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WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM
Worth playing WoW again? We tell you! PG. 74

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®

ISSUE 06 | JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

@gamer

2011
A LOOK AHEAD

THE HOTTEST GAMES OF 2011 UNVEILED! PG. 50

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Bigger bat world, more bat foes. PG. 16

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LittleBigPlanet 2
This is it, Sackboy fans! We review the most ambitious PS3 game ever. PG. 66

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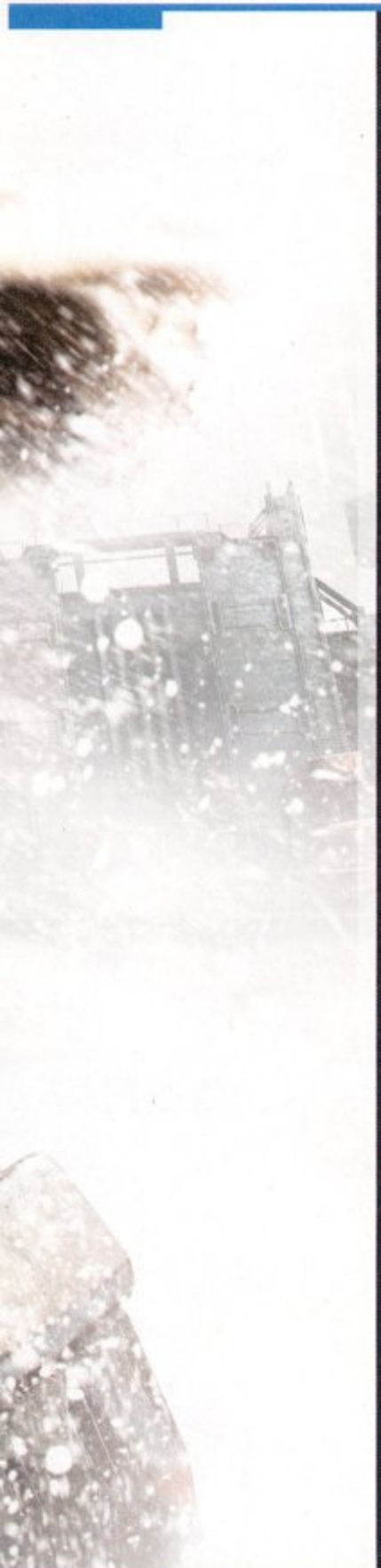

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WONDER WOMAN TM & ©DC COMICS.

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MEET THE STAFF

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
Fresh from a fairy-tale trip to Japan, Andy has been excited to share his newfound love for everything Pokémon. He brought back some awesome souvenirs!

Steve Klett Editor at Large
The newest member of our team, Steve joins us after decades of writing about games and technology. Give him a warm welcome, won't you?

Andy Salisbury Associate Editor
Always one to enjoy World of Warcraft, Andy S. has been glued to Cataclysm since it came out. He's already got a Level 85, and is now working on his Goblin. We'd better go feed him!

Jenny Esdaile Art Director
Jenny got to enjoy her home country of Australia for the holidays, but is happy to be back with us in the States. For one thing, the videogames over here are cheaper!

Jillian Pierce Designer
Since joining the podcast, Jillian has been a constant source of entertainment for listeners. Why not ask her a zombie-related question? She's an expert on them!

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Welcome to 2011! As a bona fide curmudgeon, I'm happy to say that I survived the holiday season without alienating family or coworkers. (That said, I still haven't figured out who was blasting Christmas music in the Future US offices...I will find you).

The great thing about the holidays is that a ton of new games came out—though being editor in chief is a double-edged sword. I get all of the new games, but often have to immediately send them out to a reviewer. Well, this holiday break I actually got to catch up on all the games that we were so excited about...*Medal of Honor*, *Black Ops*, and *Brotherhood* come to mind. But, hey, that was last year. Now 2011 is upon us and I have a whole new crop of games set to arrive on my desk, all nice and shiny, only to be sent out to the ungrateful horde.

Speaking of 2011, what better way to ring in the new year than to run down all of the hot new games that will keep you busy this year? With that in mind, don't miss "2011: A Look Ahead" (though we'll bring you much more information about the best games throughout the year).

Don't forget to check out the @GAMER podcast at www.atgamer-podcast.com—and stay tuned for more information on the @GAMER iPad app. Lastly, we'd appreciate it if you'd participate in our latest survey, which is can be found at http://bbyurl.us/FirstToKnow. Thanks for your help!

William O'Neal
Editor in Chief

Staff_

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→ In the preview for Bodycount on page 23 of Issue 5, you mention that Codemasters is the developer of Black for the Xbox and PS2. However, it's not! The developers of Black is Criterion.

—Christopher via e-mail

ED: Good eye, Chris! While you're absolutely right on our wording, we should make note that Stuart Black, who was in charge of Black, is in charge of Bodycount. Different studios, but the same guy! (Many thanks to @GAMER contributor Mitch Dyer for setting us straight on that.)

→ You have a very serious omission in your *Need For Speed Hot Pursuit* review. Your review lists the Wii as being included as the game reviewed when it most certainly is not. I know from bitter experience, the Wii version of the game is basically an update of *GTI Club Supermini Festa!*

—Martin via e-mail

ED: In our review for *Hot Pursuit*, we note that the Wii is one of the platforms the game is available on, but we don't say that we reviewed that version. You make a good point, though. Starting in this issue, we'll indicate which version(s) we've played in our review, so it's clear to the readers.

→ I just received my complementary magazine from you guys, and I must say I have been once again won over by Best Buy. Not only for offering generous and reasonable prices for trade-ins on games (GameStop was only offering me $8, while the same game at Best Buy got me $30), but by offering coupons for the stores. I am looking forward to future issues and seeing what exciting deals y'all will have in store for us. And please, don't convert your magazine to that cheap newspaper-like material the others have turned to! Keep up the good work.

—Amer via e-mail

ED: Many thanks for the kind words, Amer! We're glad our pals at Best Buy are good to you for trade-ins, and we're even happier that we can provide solid coupons. And worry not about the magazine's material! We'll keep it über high-quality until Andy S. stops obsessing over everything Warcraft. (Read: forever.)

→ Finally! A games magazine that's actually about...GAMES!!! I was a subscriber to another GAMEr PROfessional magazine for over 15 years and all of a sudden they want to score journalism points instead of talking about all the fun stuff that hooked me since my Atari 2600. I want to be informed, and read articles about games and such, not find out how Pac-Man inadvertently shaped society as we know it! Thank you, @GAMER, for bringing the sexy back to the gaming magazine world.

—G-Money via e-mail

ED: Wearing these form-fitting jeans isn't easy, but someone has to do it! Oh, that's not what you meant? Well, at any rate we're thrilled that we can fill that glossy-paged void in your life and bring you the best, most concise videogame information possible. (Also, much love to our friends at GamePro. They're really nice folks, we promise!)

→ In the last issue on page 10, you talk about Bejeweled 3. However, you note that we should look forward to a review in your January 2010 issue. Don't you mean 2011?

—Nelson via e-mail

ED: We haven't mastered time travel (yet...we're so-o-o close), so we meant this issue—and you can find the review on page 88.

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

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TWEETER: WIL O'NEAL TWITTER: @WONEAL
→ Epic *Dance Central* battle going down at the @woneal household. My 13 year-old daughter is killing it.

TWEETER: ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES
→ Who says kids today don't want to read? The kid in this restaurant is reading the heck out of the *Left 4 Dead* (Xbox 360) manual.

TWEETER: ANDY SALISBURY TWITTER: @ASALISBURY
→ 11 p.m. on a Sunday night is a good time to start *Fallout: New Vegas*, right?

TWEETER: JOSH AUGUSTINE TWITTER: @JAUGUSTINE
→ Seem to be having the same problem in *DCUO* as every other superhero game: I spend 90% of my time in the character-creation tool.

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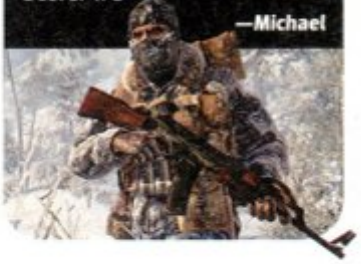
CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

Treyarch has released the newest game in the epic Call of Duty saga. This franchise has spawned countless characters and told stories over several continents. Overall this felt like it was rushed to production and the graphics a bit cheap, which is a shame because Treyarch's last big release was *World at War* nearly two years ago. Aside from that, the zombies mode is amazing—it provides hours of fun whether you are playing solo, with a friend in your living room, or with up to three friends on Xbox LIVE. You have to try it!
Score: 4/5

—Michael



[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

▸ **AWWWW, CUTE!**
Why do the Pokémon Center staffers have to regularly clean the glass displays? Lots of hand and face prints...

▾ **I PEEK'ATCHU**
A giant Pikachu wall graphic greets visitors.

◂ **PLAY CHAIR**
Super Potato has a special chair—a game-cart throne.

▾ **GAME DIRECTOR**
Junichi Masuda headed up *Pokémon Black/White*'s game concept and design.

TOKYO TRAVELOGUE

Sure, you can find Pokémon at any game store...but @GAMER went to Japan to scope out the current lineup

▲ **AKIHABARA**
This Tokyo district is a mecca for geeks, home to many famous game stores and arcades.

▸ **GET 'EM ALL**
Pokémon Center sells many related products, but also offers training on the Pokémon card game (upper right).

Nintendo recently invited @GAMER's Andy Eddy on an excursion to Tokyo with other international gaming press to visit Game Freak (the Pokémon-game creator) and find out more about Pokémon in their homeland, all as background for the soon-to-be-released U.S. versions of Pokémon Black and Pokémon White (see our preview on page 41). It was a whirlwind tour—he was only there for a couple of days, but he was able to learn a lot about the new "Pocket Monsters" and also the franchise's roots at Game Freak. In his little remaining time, he also visited some other notable game-related sites in the vicinity.

They deemed Ditto the weirdest Pokémon... a tribute to the classic yellow smiley face.

DAY/TIME: MONDAY MORNING

Off to Game Freak to meet with Directors Junichi Masuda and Ken Sugimori, who have been with the company since its 1989 start. They explained how they wanted *Pokémon Black/White* to look different from the previous games in the series, but they also strived for a game that would enable players to connect with each other easily. A world with "no borders...Pokémon and people together," Masuda said—a concept he dreamed up after visiting the United Nations during a New York trip.

▲ **GAME TO GAME** Special-edition DS systems.

◀ **ART DIRECTOR** Ken Sugimori oversaw the design of all *Pokémon Black/White* characters.

▲ **CASTELIA CITY** Andy didn't visit this location on his Tokyo trip; it's a key city in *Pokémon Black/White*. Masuda said he got his inspiration for it after visiting New York City's Manhattan.

DAY/TIME: MONDAY AFTERNOON

Andy toured part of the Game Freak offices, including the themed conference rooms—one of which is like a jungle. In fact, Andy later interviewed Masuda and Sugimori here. During the sitdown, when asked if there was a Pokémon that didn't make it into a game, they explained they had considered one inspired by Dolly, the first cloned sheep, but decided it would be too controversial. And they deemed Ditto the weirdest Pokémon—a simple blob that began as a tribute to the classic yellow smiley face.

DAY/TIME: TUESDAY MORNING

The group took a bus ride to Pokémon Center, a large store that sells anything and everything to do with the creatures—plush dolls, stickers, lunch boxes, pens, and even snacks, such as cookies and...uh, dried seaweed. Within minutes of its opening, the store was crowded with enthusiasts of all ages—from little giggling kids to men in suits. One of the coolest items was "Pokémon Battrio" (short for "battle trio"), a coin-op strategy arcade game for one or two players.

DAY/TIME: TUESDAY AFTERNOON

A few of the game journalists ended the trip with a jaunt to Akihabara, which is known as "Electric Town" for its many electronics shops (and, at night, garish light displays). An easy-to-miss walk-up houses Super Potato, a multi-floor vintage game shop. Here, you can find countless classic games going back numerous eras, and the walls are lined with all kinds of used cartridges, discs, and consoles. It's also a great place to find game-related books, plush dolls, and perhaps a rare trinket.

Just when you thought it was safe to put down that iPad...who are we kidding? It's well known that anyone and everyone who owns an iPad never puts it down. But assuming you do have a few free moments when you're not playing the latest version of *Angry Birds* or streaming *Family Guy* on Netflix or reading some e-book, we offer yet another reason that you should never let that beloved tablet-thing out of your sight: the new @GAMER iPad app.

Your ultimate source for all things @GAMER, our iPad app is an excellent repository where you can find information about the games and gear that you're excited about. The @GAMER iPad app puts news, features, previews, and reviews from the magazine itself at your fingertips, and it boasts an exclusive "Buy Now" button that allows you to purchase the games you're reading about then and there, on the fly. You can't do that with a paper mag!

With more than 40 stories currently available, each month the @GAMER iPad App will be updated with new content, from news, previews, and editorials to features, reviews, and gear, ensuring that the information you crave will be up-to-date.

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▲ The app will be packed with previews and reviews. And the "Buy Now" button makes purchases easy.

▲ With the app in hand, you can easily check out all of our gear features.

EVENTS

YOU CAN'T MISS!

▼ Tired of seeing this dude's mug? Well, too bad! *Cataclysm* is here to stay, baby.

World of Warcraft: Cataclysm is finally here to shatter Azeroth (and your schedule)

Deathwing is one big, nasty dragon, with enough sheer power to completely destroy the realm that many World of Warcraft players have come to call home. His rage has forever transformed the landscape of Azeroth, and as it turns out, his rage can now completely decimate your work and school schedules too, thanks to the release of World of Warcraft: Cataclysm.

Of course, with a big game launch comes awesome midnight releases! Best Buy stores all over the country held their own events to make sure the denizens of Azeroth could be online and ready to go the moment the clock struck midnight.

Thanks to events like this, Cataclysm became the fastest-selling PC game of all time, selling a whopping 3.3 million copies in the first 24 hours. That even beats the record set by the last expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, which sold 2.8 million its first day. And who says PC gaming is dead?

Interested in checking out an event like this on your own? We've got your back! If you flip the page a few times you'll end up at our calendar, with all the latest information regarding game releases, launch events, and even some fun trivia tidbits. Also, a special thanks to Pete Cermak at Best Buy for providing the pictures! ◉

GO TO PG 74

Wondering if you should buy it? Check out our in-depth review to get all the information!

WITH A BIG GAME LAUNCH COMES AWESOME MIDNIGHT RELEASES!

LET'S DISH!

@GAMER's resident girl about town brings you the hottest news, straight from the *Hot Pursuit* launch party down in Hollywood!

This Month I saw...

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

Sometimes videogame launch parties are held at locations I might otherwise not go to because I am a square. EA recently held its *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* party at the Avalon nightclub in Hollywood. I don't want to completely kill the dream here but I'm not the club type, so it was my first time to the venue. Before I even stepped into the building I noticed the entire street was full of cars with fancy Italian names I couldn't pronounce, my favorite being the police car from the game. The party was packed but luckily I got to flash my press badge and be VIP the whole night. I wore really high shoes, I couldn't be expected to wait in lines.

◂ Booked [L]
Okay, so my night didn't go entirely as planned.

◂ Hold that Pose [R]
The Seacrest County PD administers really weird sobriety tests.

TOP 5

HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE GAMES THAT ARE OCCUPYING MY TIME THIS MONTH:

05.
Mass Effect 2 (PS3)
Mass Effect 2 was my favorite game of 2010, as it already came out on the Xbox 360 and PC. PS3 owners are finally getting a chance to play one of the best sci-fi RPGs. This version of *Mass Effect 2* is built on *Mass Effect 3*'s engine, so be prepared for a visually stunning game.

04.
LittleBigPlanet 2 (PS3)
Sackboy is back and with the help of "the Alliance" must stop "The Negativitron" from destroying Craftworld. Fans of *LittleBigPlanet* will be pleased to know the three million user-created LBP1 levels can be carried over into LBP2.

03.
Dead Space 2 (PS3)
If you're a fan of survival horror then look no further. Isaac Clarke is back as the game picks up where *Dead Space* left off. DS2 also includes tense multiplayer.

02.
Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds (Xbox 360, PS3)
In this not-so-typical fighting game you can fight as Team Marvel or Team Capcom in a wild crossover battle that'll have you mashing buttons like your life depends on it.

01.
Killzone 3 (PS3)
Killzone 3 picks up right where the PS3's premier first-person shooter exclusive left off and continues the story of Sev, a special forces operative. *Killzone 3* is one of the first PS3 games to support 3D TVs—very cool.

Tips and Tricks: Yoda was Wrong

What if there's a videogame you have your eye on but you're not sure about committing? Standalone downloadable content (DLC) is rare. In most cases DLC is an add-on to an existing game you already own. But *Dead Rising 2* recently had two standalone DLC games. *Case Zero* was a prologue to *Dead Rising 2* and *Case West* caught up with *Dead Rising* hero Frank. Neither game required *Dead Rising 2* to play but progress made in both games could carry over to *DR2*. Basically, for a fraction of the cost these let you test-drive a full game. These DLCs differ from demos in that aren't simply the first levels of a game. Instead they're unique experiences, which allow you to familiarize yourself with the controls, the story, and the characters. Another example of this is *Red Dead Redemption*'s *Undead Nightmare* DLC. This DLC isn't necessarily cannon but you get to ride the four horses of the Apocalypse. Like *Case Zero* and *Case West* it's a standalone title, so you can go adventure as John Marston and get a taste of the Wild West.

▲ A pitchfork? That's the best you can do? A pitchfork?

▲ Why are these zombies dressed like cowboys? Oh yeah.

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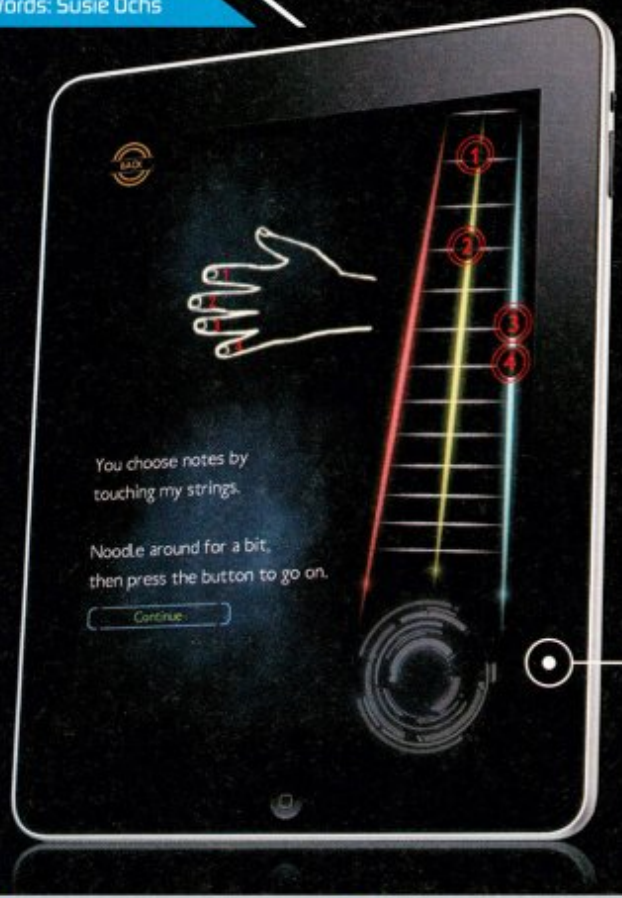
XBOX 360
Jump in.

Words: Susie Ochs

Featured Game:

A SECOND CAREER?

When you get home from your job you can take your iPad out busking. *Magic Fiddle* pays for itself!



The game emphasizes good real-life habits like proper posture and hand placement.

MAGIC FIDDLE

$2.99
Smule, smule.com

From the brilliant minds at Smule who brought us the other ocarina of (our) time, *Magic Fiddle* is a virtual three-string violin that you play by propping the iPad under your chin (yes, really!) and using one finger to draw bow strokes while the other presses down strings to play notes. The game teaches you gradually—your first songs will sound like they're being played by a beginner, but you'll soon be making beautiful music. Then you can take the show on the road with online performances, try to rack up high scores and medals for playing well, and busk your way up the global leaderboards. 99 cent song packs offer more replayability, but it's magic all on its own.

It's a party.

ACROSS AGE HD

$7.99
FDG Entertainment,
fdg-entertainment.com

Retro RPGs never go out of style, and Across Age HD has multiple characters to switch between, fun boss battles, and clever time-travel puzzles throughout its 2D world of Hyrule Heights. It's easy enough for action-RPG newbies to have fun with, but its 15 hours of gameplay pack in enough depth for fans of the genre, too. The sprites' revealing outfits did nab it a 12+ rating, though—one more reason to love this game.

To everything, turn, turn, turn...

GEARED FOR IPAD

free
Bryan Mitchell,
briandev.com

Fit the gears together to make them all turn—such an easy concept they make toys for toddlers based on it. Geared for iPad has no set grid to lock you into gear placement. The gears can go anywhere, but thanks to the various obstacles, you can never place them exactly where you need them. Its "just one more level" addictiveness plus the 150 ever-harder levels equal one awesome game.

You can control on iPad via your iPhone.

CHOPPER 2

$4.99
Majic Jungle Software,
majicjungle.com

Piloting a chopper around these gorgeous 3D worlds is oddly soothing, even when you're aiming your machine gun at army guys and blasting them to kingdom come. You fly by tilting your iPad (or iPhone or iPod touch, since it's Universal), or if you have multiple devices, you can use one to steer and another one as the screen. OpenFeint network support can even sync your progress between devices. Don't miss this one.

Humans fighting each other: How novel.

CIVILIZATION WARS HD

$1.99
Chillingo, chillingo.com

Real-time strategy can be adorable as well as brutal, and Civilization Wars HD is a little of both. This little game is packed with replayability thanks to its multiple game modes, difficulty levels, and playable "races." The bright, cheery graphics remind me of Colorforms (remember those?), assuming they ever made a Colorform representing earthquakes or waves of fire (probably not). Mmm, destruction.

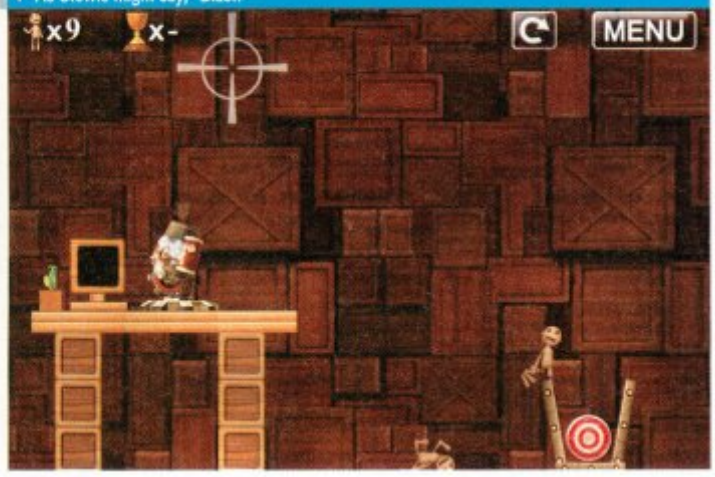
▼ You can tweak the tilt sensitivity and control placement.

NANOSAUR 2

$0.99
Pangea Software, pangeasoft.net

If Nanosaur seems ripped from the dreams of a 14-year-old boy, that's just because it's so awesome. You are a pterodactyl flying around picturesque 3D landscapes collecting eggs and blasting things with friggin laser beams (as well as other awesome weapons). Robotic defense systems and wandering brachiosauruses never went so well together, and the tilt-flying works great. The iPhone version (yep, it's Universal) even has network multiplayer via Game Center.

▼ As Stewie might say, "Blast!"



RAGDOLL BLASTER 2

$3.99
Backflip Studios, backflipstudios.com

The iPad's beefy processor and nimble touchscreen make it a natural for physics games, and *Ragdoll Blaster* is accessible, addictive, and dead-simple—gaming for dummies, pun totally intended. You blast ragdolls (hence the name) at a target, with a wide array of obstacles to work around and problems to overcome. All you do is tap the screen to fire, but solving each puzzle can take a maddening amount of retries. Luckily, it's impossible to put down.

Big Screen or Little Screen?

FUN FOR ALL

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Universal games are the App Store's two-for-one—you pay once and get native versions for both your iPad and iPhone (or iPod touch). Look for a little plus sign next to the app's price in the App Store; that's how you know. These 10 games all swing both ways.

01 **SMURFS' VILLAGE** free, freeverse.com
The original blue man group are a natural fit for a *Farmville/We Rule* clone. Plant crops, build mushroom houses, complete goals, and play minigames.

02 **LINKOIDZ** $0.99, retrodreamer.com
Rack up combos in match-three missions, plus Zen, Endless, and Sprint modes. The spaceman graphics are right out of a coloring book, but the fast-paced action stays fun.

03 **POCKET FROGS** free, nimblebit.com
I can't quite see the point of *Pocket Frogs*: You collect many species of awesome frogs, breed them, and watch them hop around. But I can't stop playing.

04 **FINAL FREEWAY** $0.99, oyatsukai.com
Nostalgic for 8-bit arcade racers like *Cruisin' USA* or *Outrun*? This'll rev your engine: eight levels, accelerometer or touch steering, and two difficulty modes.

05 **YETISPORTS PENGUIN X RUN** $0.99, penguinxrun.com
A gang of lemming-like penguins is ready to do your bidding. Lead them around the colorful 3D environments solving puzzles to complete 25 tricky missions.

06 **BATTLE BEARS -1** $0.99, battlebears.com
Come for the cuteness, stay for the frantic shooting action, precise controls, tough bosses, outlandish weapons, and because the cuteness really is pretty hilarious.

07 **AGE OF ZOMBIES** $2.99, halfbrick.com
Barry Steakfries is a natural-born zombie killer, blasting through undead across a story mode of six humorous, charmingly *Zelda*-esque levels, plus survival mode.

08 **CRO-MAG RALLY** $0.99, pangeasoft.net
Race 11 karts through nine prehistoric 3D tracks, with Game Center network multiplayer on supported iDevices (including iPads running iOS 4.2 or later).

09 **SOLIPSKIER** $2.99, mikengreg.com
This one's trippy on any-sized screen; you draw rainbow roads with your finger for your tiny skier to slalom through, busting gnarly tricks. Whoa.

10 **WORMS 2: ARMAGEDDON** $4.99, team17.com
What's that? More Worms? Its turn-based strategy gameplay is classic, the graphics are delightful, and with Universal status all your devices can have *Worms*.

CALENDAR

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3 Fate of Two Worlds

JANUARY 2011

■ Game Release Date ■ @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	31				■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 8	01 NEW YEAR'S DAY
03		04 ■ LOST IN SHADOW ↘ 2003 – *Unreal II* goes gold.	05 ↘ 1985 – Nintendo first shows the Nintendo Entertainment System in the U.S.	06 ↘ 2001 – Microsoft unveils the original Xbox.	07	08
09	10	11 ■ DC UNIVERSE ONLINE ■ KINGDOM HEARTS RE:CODED ↘ 2007 – *World of Warcraft* reaches over eight million subscribers.	12 ↘ 2000 – USPS issues a stamp depicting videogames, part of its series on memories of the 1980s.	13 ↘ 1999 – Valve announces *Team Fortress Classic*, a free add-on for *Half-Life*.	14 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 9	15
16	17 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY	18 ■ LITTLEBIGPLANET 2 ■ MASS EFFECT 2 [PS3] ■ MINDJACK	19	20 ↘ Will Wright's birthday.	21	22
23 ↘ 2001 – *Command & Conquer: Generals* goes gold.	24	25 ■ DEAD SPACE 2 ■ TWO WORLDS II ■ YOU DON'T KNOW JACK	26	27 ↘ 1972 – Magnavox begins production of the Odyssey video game system.	28 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 10	29

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FEBRUARY 2011

■ Game Release Date ■ @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		01 ↘ 1991 – id Software is born. ↘ 1990 – Nintendo ships *Super Mario Bros. 3* for the Nintendo Entertainment System in the U.S.	02 GROUNDHOG DAY	03	04 ↘ 2000 – *The Sims* released.	05
06	07	08 ■ NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: Shinobi Rumble ■ TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	09	10	11 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 11	12 ↘ 2003 – Sony releases *EverQuest Online Adventures* on PS2. ↘ Cliff Bleszinski's birthday.
13	14 VALENTINE'S DAY	15 ■ MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3: Fate of Two Worlds	16	17	18	19
20	21 PRESIDENT'S DAY	22 ■ DE BLOB 2 ■ KILLZONE 3 ■ BULLETSTORM	23	24	25 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 12	26
27	28					

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BATMAN ARKHAM CITY

The return of the Dark Knight has me all aflutter • Words: Tom Price

2009's *Batman: Arkham Asylum* did something amazing, aside from being a great game: It broke the long-running curse on Batman videogames. With the sequel, *Batman: Arkham City*, developer Rocksteady intends to prove that the first game was no fluke, and continue to improve upon what's now something of a modern classic.

Set approximately a year after the events of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the catastrophic events of that game have left the asylum unusable as a prisoner-holding facility. This gives its former warden (and new Gotham mayor) Quincy Sharp the opportunity to execute a longstanding plan to turn an entire city neighborhood into a secure prison. As long as the prisoners promise not to escape they can have more or less free reign of their makeshift ghetto. Of course, long experience tells Batman that Gotham criminals can't be trusted, so he keeps the place under his persistent bat-gaze. Good thing, too, because notorious baddies like the Joker, Two-Face and Mr. Freeze are lurking about, and they have legions of roughnecks on the streets ready to do their bidding.

Rocksteady isn't reinventing the wheel for *Arkham City*; the devs know that the formula they concocted for the first game worked well, and simply want to enhance it. Toward that end, they've improved the hand-to-hand combat by letting you use all of your gadgets in the middle of a fight, perform maneuvers on multiple enemies at once, and snatch thrown weapons out of the air. The detective mode has also been enhanced, with new features that you'll use to solve more complex forensic puzzles and track the different gang allegiances.

Probably the biggest change will come in the environment itself. The open-world design of Arkham City is a lot different from the smaller, more confined areas of Arkham Asylum, letting you take more advantage of Batman's gliding abilities. Enhanced bat abilities in a larger game world populated by a more complex group of classic Batman villains sounds like a more complete Batman videogame experience. And that's a very good thing.

There are still plenty more details to come about *Batman: Arkham City*, especially in regards to a planned multiplayer mode, which could be competitive or co-operative, nobody outside of the game makers knows for sure. What I do know for sure is that the game is very high on my list of most anticipated games for 2011.

THE FORMULA THEY BUILT THE FIRST GAME AROUND IS WORKING...

▲ Debilitating fear of clowns? If that happens to be your Achilles' Heel than *Arkham City* will have you good and freaked out.

▼ Batman may be against killing the bad guys, but he's quite enthusiastic about pounding them senseless with his bat-fists.

ARE YOU READY TO RUMBLE?

The revamped fighting system in *Arkham City* adds a couple of elements that should make the action more fun, as well as more challenging. Now you can use your gadgets mid-battle; for example, stick some explosive gel to an opponent to detonate later. You can also grab objects that are thrown at you, then turn them around and use them as weapons. Timing is crucial, though: Get it wrong and Batman'll need more band-aids.

▲ HEAD-TO-HEAD
Improvements to the combat system let Batman pull off multiple-enemy attack moves, such as this frantic check for head lice. (Criminal clowns are filthy creatures.)

Catwoman (Selena Kyle) enjoys the breeze.

Two-Face had some work done.

Harley Quinn is a hot mess.

Batman gets all emo sometimes.

ROGUE'S GALLERY

The legendary villainy of Gotham

What is Batman without his unique and strange enemies? Just another vigilante in tights. *Arkham City* features a number of his old foes, including the Joker and Harley Quinn, who return from the first game. But other old adversaries abound, and we should also see appearances from Two-Face (who is trying to kill Batman's sometimes-ally Catwoman), Mr. Freeze, Calendar Man, and Hugo Strange. Many of the voice actors who've played those characters recently will also be on hand, but Mark Hamill has announced that this will be the last time he plays the Joker. That's sad, because he's awesome at it. There are also rumors that we might finally get to see The Riddler, but that one earns a big question mark.

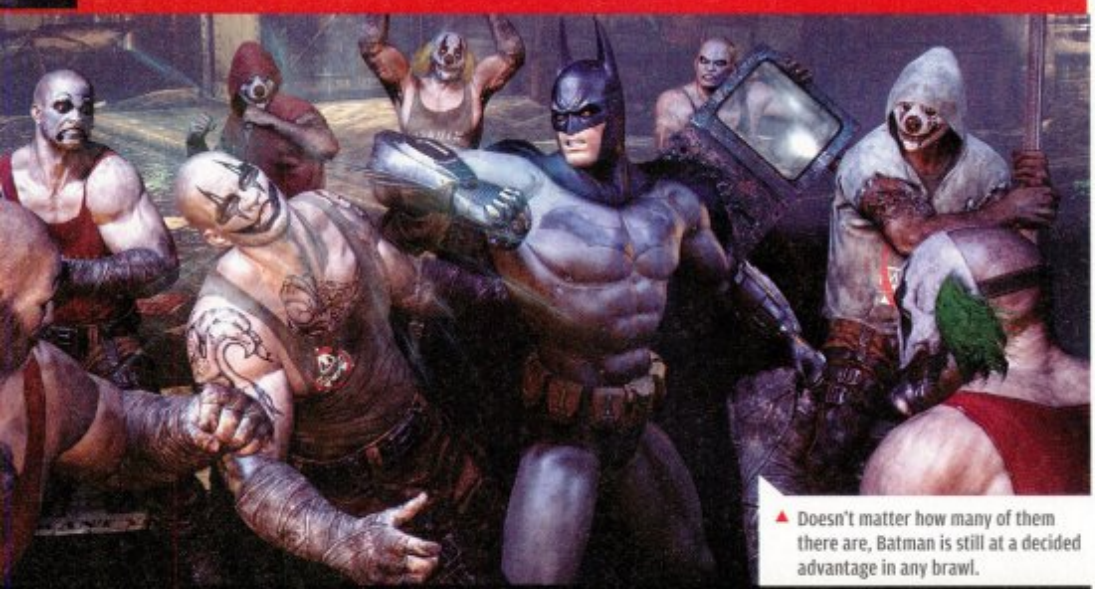
DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED FISTICUFFS

01 THE BAT
Trained in all kinds of martial arts, he kicks butt three ways to Sunday. Now, he has even more combat tricks up his bat-sleeves.

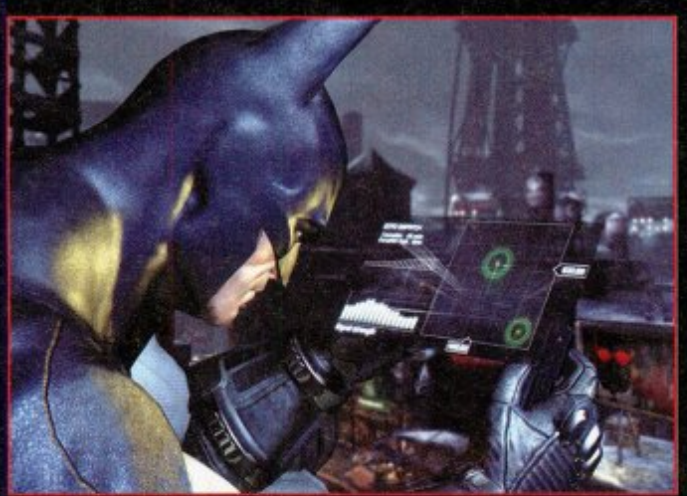
02 POOR SHLUB
This guy is taking his whooping easy, but there will be tougher enemies in *Batman: Arkham City*, ones with armor.

03 GUNMAN
Guys with guns will still glow orange, but now you'll have better options to fend off projectiles while you fight other enemies.

04 SWORDSMAN
Enemies will rue the day they brought a knife to a bat-fight, as you can easily disarm your foes and wield their weapons against them.



▲ Doesn't matter how many of them there are, Batman is still at a decided advantage in any brawl.



BATMAN, P.I.

Detective mode will become a more powerful and smoothly integrated tool this time out. With the ability to interpret forensic evidence and cross-reference bad guys with a database of known gangs, you'll solve puzzles and complete entire side missions solely through your detective work. Fighting crime is about more than just fighting: It's also about locking onto environmental hotspots and hitting a scan button. In other words, while detective mode's upgraded, don't expect anything *too* complex.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

INFO
Publisher: Warner Bros Interactive
Developer: Rocksteady
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes, TBD

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
Fall 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Dark Knights and other vigilantes, preferably those old enough for a little violence.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you haven't played *Arkham Asylum*, what are you waiting for? And if you have, it's even better the second time around.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The sequel to an amazing game should be even more amazing
- Improved fighting should improve the pace
- More detailed, less obtrusive detective mode

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Where's Robin?

NASCAR 2011 THE GAME

Because "NASCAR on Ice 2011" just wouldn't make any sense

• Words: Andy Salisbury

Drivers turning left: For most of my life I thought of NASCAR as just that. Given that I'm from the Pacific Northwest, baseball and football were the only prominent sports in my life, and stock car racing never even showed up on my radar. That was, until, I was exposed to the hardcore math, science, and strategy behind NASCAR, which is exemplified in *NASCAR The Game 2011*.

NASCAR The Game 2011 aims to provide the complete NASCAR experience for both purists and casual players. For starters, the game will include all of the tracks from not only the 2010 Sprint Cup series, but also the Kentucky Speedway from the upcoming 2011 season. Additionally, all of the driver team changes and updated paint schemes for next season will be available as a free patch shortly after the game's launch.

A big draw of NASCAR races is, without a doubt, the wrecks. They're what you'll see on the highlight reels, and for some fans, their only source of interest in the sport. *NASCAR The Game 2011* won't skimp in this department. The game's damage system is designed so that each area of the car will display damage as it happens, and, judging from my time with the alpha, it delivers. More often than not I'd find myself bumping my back-right bumper into the wall of the track, and this damage would show up exactly as I expected. First it was only scuffs, but soon it progressed to the entire back corner of my car being almost completely gone. More importantly, the game realistically modeled the damage my car took when I spun around 180° on the track and drove head-on into a pack of 42 cars.

A BIG DRAW OF NASCAR RACES IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE WRECKS

NASCAR The Game 2011 promises to be completely open to players of all skill levels. For drivers who aren't incredibly experienced and just want to drive a stock car with an automatic transmission, there will be plenty of pre-set options that allow you to simply jump into the game and drive. Best of all, if you manage to get into a wreck or take a turn incorrectly, a rewind feature will let you jump back in time 5–10 seconds, giving you your own personal reset button.

NASCAR The Game 2011 has all the right people behind it. The minds over at Eutechnyx are working on one of the most authentic race experiences that you can get outside of the track. With 16-player online multiplayer for the Xbox 360 and PS3 in the works and all the science behind pit stops, tire wear, and fuel consumption ready for the most hardcore players, this is one to keep an eye out for.

DRIVERS, START YOUR ENGINES!

Whether it's the flyover by F-18s that happens at the beginning of the race, or making sure that each driver keeps in line behind the pace car during an accident, *NASCAR The Game 2011* seeks to provide you with the most authentic racing experience you can get outside of either being a professional NASCAR driver or stepping into the Richard Petty Driving Experience. Given that the last NASCAR game came out back in 2009, Eutechnyx is constantly raising the bar internally in an effort to release the undisputed champion of NASCAR gaming. That includes *Gran Turismo 5* (which Eutechnyx believes it hase a clear-cut advantage on...at least on the NASCAR side).

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

NASCAR THE GAME 2011

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Eutechnyx
Platforms: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16 players online for the Xbox 360 and PS3, 2-player split-screen for Wii

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
March 29, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Race fans of all skill levels

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Prepare yourself for some realistic racing with Forza Motorsport 3. Sure, the cars are drastically different, but you'll learn some driving discipline!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Realistic crashes
- Tons of drivers and cars
- Every course imaginable

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Unless you're a purist, there's always *Gran Turismo 5*, right?

If you're a simulation junkie, then the cockpit is the place for you!

THE PAPERCLIP!

Every track, including Martinsville Speedway, has been recreated with painstaking detail.

It can get intense when amid a pack of 43 cars. Just make sure not to pull a Jeff Burton!

ALL 23 TRACKS! YES, 23!

The 2010 NASCAR Sprint Cup season had 22 tracks in it. But in 2011 NASCAR will add the Kentucky Speedway to the docket, making for a healthy 23-track season. While this news came relatively deep into the development cycle, Eutechnyx went out to the track, snapped over 3,000 photos, and got to designing it straight away. The Kentucky Speedway staff was caught a bit off-guard when Eutechnyx completed the track's new grandstand in the game before it was done in the real world! Blueprints: They're awesome.

STRAIGHT 'OUTTA BRISTOL

From the inside
You won't see them often, but the drivers were all designed in detail!

To the outside!
The cars, which will definitely be seen, are also extremely detailed.

EVERY CAR, EVERY DRIVER, EVERY PIT CREW

Every single car, driver, and pit crew have been accurately incorporated into the game with their 2010 gear. But what about 2011? Don't worry, they're covered too. Once they become available the 2011 paint schemes, team changes, and uniforms will all be released as a free download. No need to worry about getting nickeled and dimed—just patch up and enjoy.

RIFT

Tear the universe a new one • Words: Matt Cabral

Introducing an MMORPG into the *World of Warcraft*-dominated space is a daunting task. But Trion Worlds' ambitious entry, *Rift*, is prepping to take on the Alliance and Horde anyway. While borrowing elements (guilds, dungeons, raids, auctions, crafting, PvP combat, and more) perfected by *WoW*, *Rift* is also stirring some fresh ideas into its MMORPG cauldron. For starters, its universe-tearing portals provide infinite opportunities for dynamic combat, evolving environments, and game-changing encounters. Enemies, powered by primal elements such as fire, water, air, life, death, and earth, seep into the world through these fractures. A fire rift, for example, may randomly unleash flame-spitting beasts and land-consuming lava into a previously peaceful area. Such threats can be thwarted if dealt with swiftly, but if you allow the evil-spewing floodgates to open, madness will—quite literally—break loose.

Rift preps its players for the coming apocalypse with an experimentation-encouraging class system. You first choose a "calling"—warrior, cleric, mage, or rogue—within the warring Guardian or Defiant factions. From there, you build "soul trees," allowing character customization to blossom within multiple disciplines. This unprecedented level of freedom means broadsword-wielding warriors can eventually cast complicated spells, while spell-weaving mages can become skilled in close combat. Ideally, this means that you won't be unduly punished for tinkering with your character progression. Complemented by a rich fantasy setting, *Rift*'s promising ideas may be just what the healer ordered.

RIFT IS ALSO STIRRING SOME FRESH IDEAS INTO ITS CAULDRON

GAMEPLAY \\

▲ If they aren't dealt with properly, rifts in the world will tear open and wreak havoc. Don't let them sit for too long!

▲ Favoring realistic visuals over *WoW*'s cartoonish aesthetic, *Rift* sports stunning high-definition graphics that owners of even lower-end systems can enjoy.

PC

GAME DETAILS

RIFT

INFO
Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: Trion Worlds
Platforms: PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMORPG

RELEASE DATE
March 1, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
MMORPG fans looking to be wowed by a *WoW* alternative

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Rift will likely be a strong alternative to *World of Warcraft*. But in the meantime, crank it up and get your fantasy juices flowing in Cataclysm!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- An alternative to *WoW* that brings some fresh ideas to the stale MMORPG genre
- Tearing portals promise to offer a constantly evolving world

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Others have tried competing with *WoW*...few have survived
- Are there really more ways to doll up the fantasy genre?

▸ GHASTLY: The evil Helghast return for Killzone 3, complete with matching snow gear.

KILLZONE 3

Taking the fight back to the Helghast • Words: Andrew Hayward

Following a lengthy and divisive pre-release countdown—in which gamers debated the game's visuals and AAA merits—*Killzone 2* made good on its promise to deliver a thrilling, intricately polished, platform-exclusive first-person shooter for PlayStation 3. Luckily, the wait for a follow-up will be much shorter this time around, as the release of *Killzone 3* is just around the corner.

Killzone 3 picks up where its sharp predecessor left off, following hero Sev and his partner Rico—operatives in the Interplanetary Strategic Alliance (ISA)—as they seek to further cripple the fascist Helghast Empire after killing its leader at the end of *Killzone 2*. The campaign promises significantly more environmental variety, including snow-covered scenery and fewer closed corridors, plus the addition of violently enhanced melee attacks, a powerful new WASP missile turret, and the ability to whip around the battlefield in jet packs.

But as with *Killzone 2*, multiplayer will no doubt offer the most value and lasting entertainment. I had a chance to check out a couple of the new play modes and maps, and found that *Killzone 3* builds strongly on the foundation of its predecessor. Those who logged endless nights waging war between the Helghast and ISA will immediately recognize the distinct character classes (I like the Infiltrator, who appears to be a teammate until he bashes your skull in), points-based upgrade system, and the dynamically changing objective mode, Warzone.

Beyond the new Guerrilla Warfare deathmatch mode, I think fans will take quickly to the new Operations mode, a search-and-destroy-style, objective-based option that utilizes cut-scenes to add context and highlight actions throughout each match. When you win a match, it's awesomely satisfying to see, for example, a visual depiction of you and your teammates escaping on a hovership as the dam explodes, flooding the Helghan countryside.

Plus, the massive new maps—including mech suit-friendly urban wasteland, Corinth Highway, and Turbine Concourse SE-6, a crumbling factory that emanates a near-deafening buzzing sound—immediately make a strong impression, being gorgeously rendered throughout. If my time swapping headshots with my Helghast and ISA comrades/enemies is any indication, PlayStation 3 shooter diehards will have another impressive exclusive come February.

MULTIPLAYER WILL OFFER THE MOST VALUE AND LASTING ENTERTAINMENT

New jet packs give you the ability to hover around the battlefield with ease.

MOVE IN 3D!

Killzone 3 embraces both of Sony's latest technological initiatives: the PlayStation Move Motion Controller and stereoscopic 3D support. Now, you'll be able to strap on some 3D glasses and use the Move to blast Helghan scum with pinpoint accuracy. And unless the delayed *SOCOM* 4 somehow beats it to stores, *Killzone* 3 is also likely to be the first huge "core" release to support the Move.

GAMEPLAY \\

▲ *Killzone 2*'s repetitive corridors give way to more open settings, including some snow-blanketed landscapes.

▲ The new WASP turret missile launcher enables you to light up unsuspecting Helghen targets with nine missiles at a time.

▲ Multiple new melee attack animations—such as a Helghan knife to the eye—add violent variety to your takedowns.

PRO-HELGHAST?

If you're a Killzone super-fan (and have $130 laying around), consider the *Killzone 3 Helghast Edition*, which bundles the game with a Helghast helmet replica, an art book, and a Helghast cloaking marksman action figure. It also includes the aptly named Super Voucher, which enables you to download the game's soundtrack and two popular maps from *Killzone 2*, and also grants complete access to all weapons and abilities—along with double XP—for the first 24 hours of release.

PS3

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

KILLZONE 3

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Guerrilla Games
Platforms: PlayStation 3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
24 players across myriad competitive and team-play modes

GENRE
Shooter

RELEASE DATE
February 22, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Online shooter junkies, those

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Killzone 2 is now a Greatest Hits (read: cheap!) game. Its intense campaign and 32-player battles will prep you for *Killzone* 3.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Operations mode enhances online play with narrative cut-scenes
- ❤ Campaign promises gripping scenarios and a wider variety of locales
- ❤ Jet packs! Oh, and PlayStation Move and 3D support

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Being on the losing end of an Operations mode mission

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER

CoD and MoH may get all the press, but *Operation Flashpoint* has been a favorite of tactical simulation fans for some time • Words: William O'Neal

Military shooters tend to come in one of two flavors: run 'n' gun games like *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor*, where you can survive a lot of damage and find copious ammo and supplies, and games like Ghost Recon and Spec Ops: Rangers, where planning and teamwork are key and death comes quickly. *Operation Flashpoint: Red River* is the latter. A full-on military simulation, *Red River* is a welcomed addition to the OpFlash family of military sims. With that in mind, I traveled all the way to England to get some hands-on time with this promising shooter.

Sion Leon, *Red River*'s creative director, sums up Codemasters' goals for the game: "We wanted to make the most authentic modern combat experience you'll find on your console." The team aimed to create a situation where your soldier is "a million miles from home," and where you get to experience places, environments, and situations you might've only seen on the news. Leon calls it "war through a webcam," akin to something you may have seen on Liveleak.com.

If you're familiar with tactical simulations you'll find the game easy to pick up. You're the leader of a four-person fireteam composed of up to four classes: rifleman, grenadier, scout, and auto rifleman. The game takes place in Tajikistan, a country that's perilously placed between Afghanistan and China, and your Marines find themselves forced to battle everyone from typical insurgent to China's People's Liberation Army.

In one level my fireteam was required to defend a particular location from the advancing PLA. It's important to choose the right fireteam for the mission, command your team during battle, and monitor resources like artillery and air support. As a fan of tactical simulations, I appreciated the realistic allocation of resources and the seriousness of death. If you or your teammates are wounded it impacts the mission. Because of this, I found myself ordering teammates carefully. If one of your buddies is defending a position, and you see that he's gonna be overrun, you'll want to pull him back to safety.

In a world dominated by games like *Call of Duty*, *Operation Flashpoint: Red River* is a welcomed departure from running and gunning.

UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS

Boasting some rather varied environments, *Red River* is a tense game. In smaller arenas, going around corners can be terrifying. Similarly, in more open environments, seeing enemy helicopters flying overhead is spooky because you know that they're bringing in foes that you'll have to deal with.

▲ This game isn't about running and gunning. That said, you will get to open up from time to time.

▲ Teamwork is key. During firefights you'll have to give orders to your AI teammates to keep them effective.

CO-OP MULTIPLAYER \\

Red River doesn't have competitive multiplayer, as the developers want you to play the campaign with real-life buddies. With that in mind the game boasts four unique co-op modes: Last Stand, Combat Sweep, Rolling Thunder, and Combat Search and Rescue. Playing with your buddies as opposed to against them changes how you choose your team. If you know a particularly good sniper, you'll want to recruit 'em.

▲ You'll often have to move slowly while fighting house-to-house. Enemies will pop up out of nowhere.

THE COMBATANTS

Three go in, one comes out...

Operation Flashpoint: Red River has three unique combatants. You'll play as battle-tested Marines fresh from fighting in the Afghanistan arena, and you'll have two foes to contend with: insurgents reminiscent of those the U.S. is facing in Afghanistan, and the more mechanized and formidable Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

MATURE 17+ M

HANDS-ON

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER

INFO
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to four players cooperatively

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
Q2 2011

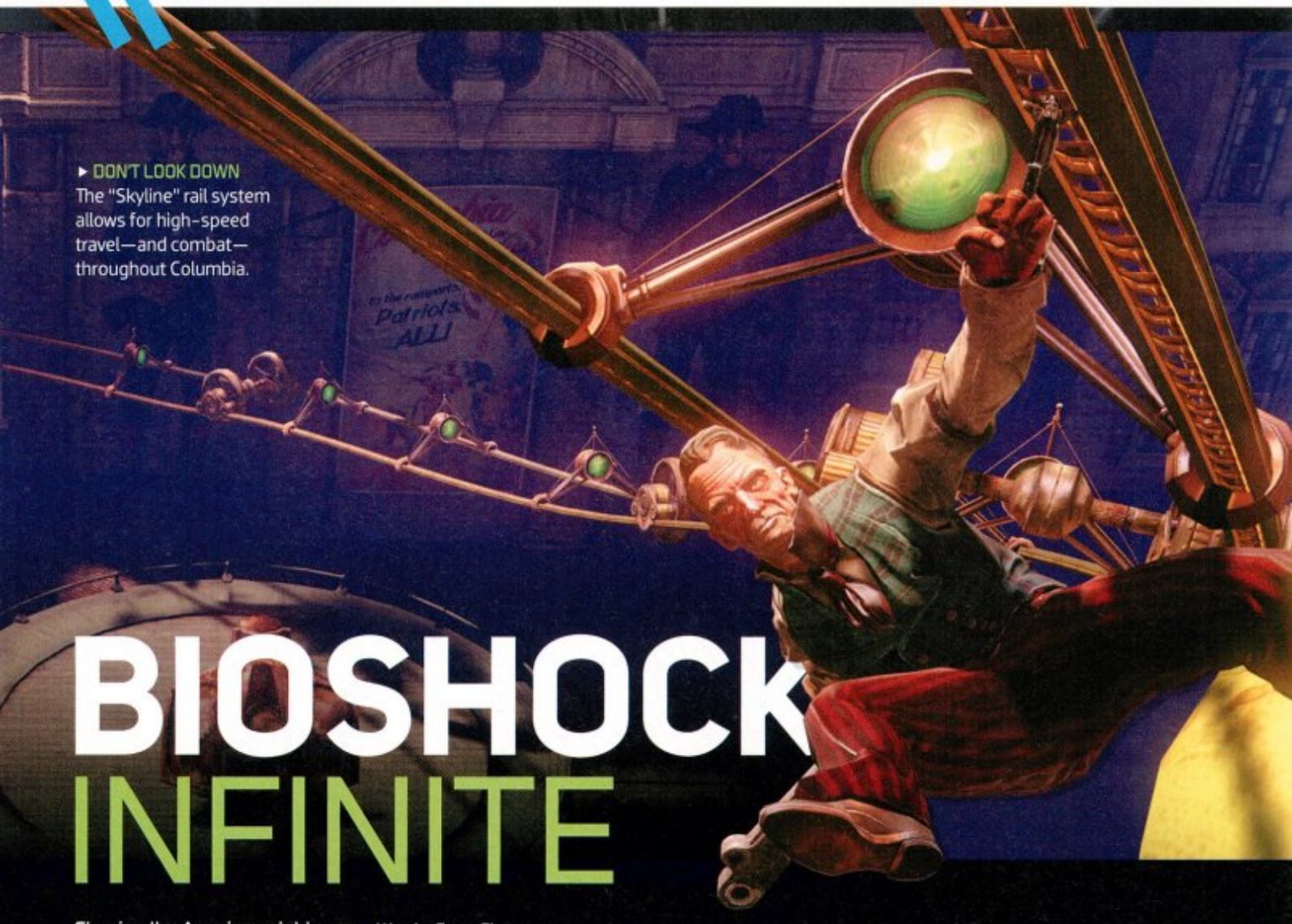
SUITABLE FOR
Fans of tactical simulations like *Ghost Recon* will eat it up

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Red River is the latest in the venerable Operation Flashpoint series. Be sure to check out its predecessors, *Dragon Rising* and *Cold War Crisis*, if you're looking for a taste.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The realistic style of gameplay is awesome
- ❤ The real-world environments are compelling

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The lack of competitive multiplayer will turn off some shooter fans



▸ DON'T LOOK DOWN
The "Skyline" rail system allows for high-speed travel—and combat—throughout Columbia.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Chasing the American nightmare • Words: Evan Shamoon

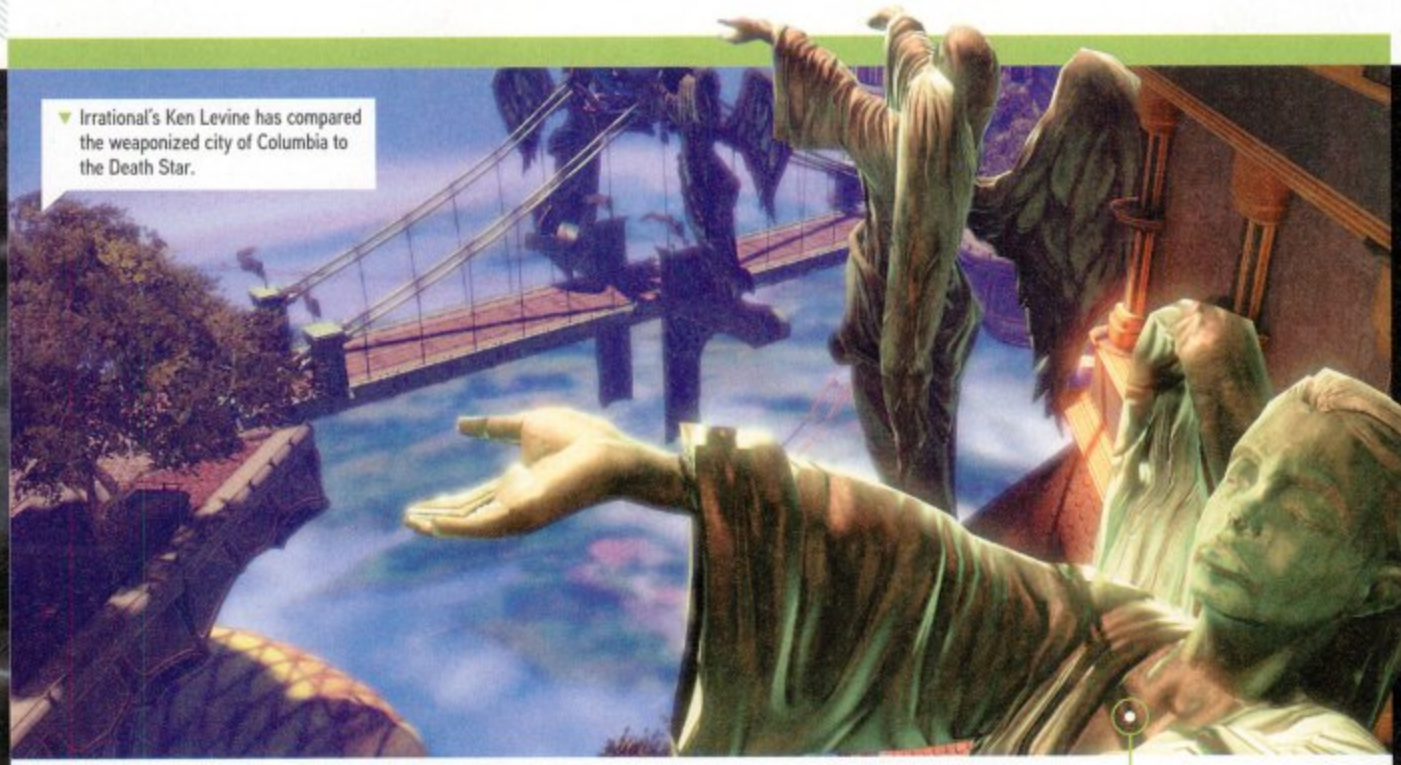
Rather than a pure sequel—that was left to 2K Marin, with 2010's *BioShock 2*—*BioShock Infinite* is a spiritual successor of sorts to the original *BioShock*. It takes place not deep below the ocean's surface, but rather high above it on Columbia, a city in the sky that sits atop a series of Victorian-era aircraft. It's a whole new world, one that required developer Irrational Games to leave the old behind.

"The mission of the studio is to surprise people," says president and creative director Ken Levine. "We had one early meeting with all the senior creatives in the group where [artist] Stephen Alexander said, 'What if we were to do a *BioShock* game that isn't in Rapture, but a totally different world?' And everyone got really quiet and interested, very quickly." It certainly wasn't the original plan to leave Rapture, but the energy was there to do so.

"Normally whenever someone [here] has an idea, it's met with a great deal of skepticism, because that's one of the reasons the studio is what it is—any idea has to fight its way to get accepted," explains Levine. "The reason we were so excited is because we had to throw away so much of what we knew, and so much of what we had worked on: Throw away the world, throw away all those characters, throw away everything that we had gotten comfortable with. That made us very uncomfortable, and the fact that we were so uncomfortable made us comfortable that we were moving in the right direction."

Indeed, it's rare for a developer to release gameplay footage some two years before its game's release, but Irrational's 10-minute video (which you can check out on YouTube), early as it may be, is pretty spectacular. The live demo begins with DeWitt on a cobblestone street; within seconds, a floating bell tower teeters and then collapses in front of him. He narrowly avoids it, and then walks past a dead horse. He sees flags with 48 stars, and a poster with the slogan, "For Faith, For Race, For Fatherland," and eventually reaches a man in a gazebo preaching to an absent audience. Signs nearby warn that "they'll take your gun," and barrels full of rifles are on display. When DeWitt does indeed take one for himself, the man sees it, his eyes and mouth begin glowing like those of Gozer the Gozerian, and the battle begins: He summons a flock of crows, which you do your best to avoid as you attempt to take him out with your scoped rifle.

Once again, *BioShock*'s brand of dual-wielding is at play: Guns go in your character's right hand, powers in the left. And choice is again at the forefront: You'll be able to decide how to fight each battle, using whatever combination of powers, weapons, and strategy you desire. Like the trailer, the whole affair feels like one long CG cut-scene; it is clearly not, however, and that is part of its magic. The action is varied, dense, and meaningful, and it's already clear that *BioShock Infinite* is a game dreaming bigger than most could have imagined.



Irrational's Ken Levine has compared the weaponized city of Columbia to the Death Star.

WELCOME TO COLUMBIA

Constructed in the early 20th century, Columbia is a floating metropolis, created to effectively show off American power, ingenuity, and prosperity, the accomplishments of a post-Civil War America. Eventually corruption sets in, however, and Columbia goes from floating world's fair to Death Star, a militarized city in the sky. This eventually leads to Columbia being abandoned by America, leaving it free to shape its own government and society. This, as you may have guessed, leads to no good whatsoever. Enter Booker DeWitt...

PROPERTY VALUES

Columbia isn't half as dilapidated as Rapture was in the first two BioShock games. The lack of millions of tons of water pressure probably helps.

CITY LIFE

01. REDRUM

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was an inspiration, with Irrational trying to transform an "antiseptic environment" into the "scariest ******* place [one's] ever seen."

02. BELIEVE

Propaganda posters from World War I inspired much of Columbia's propaganda.

03. PROS, CONS

Elizabeth has special powers, but using them puts a strain on her. Use with caution.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

INFO
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Irrational Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

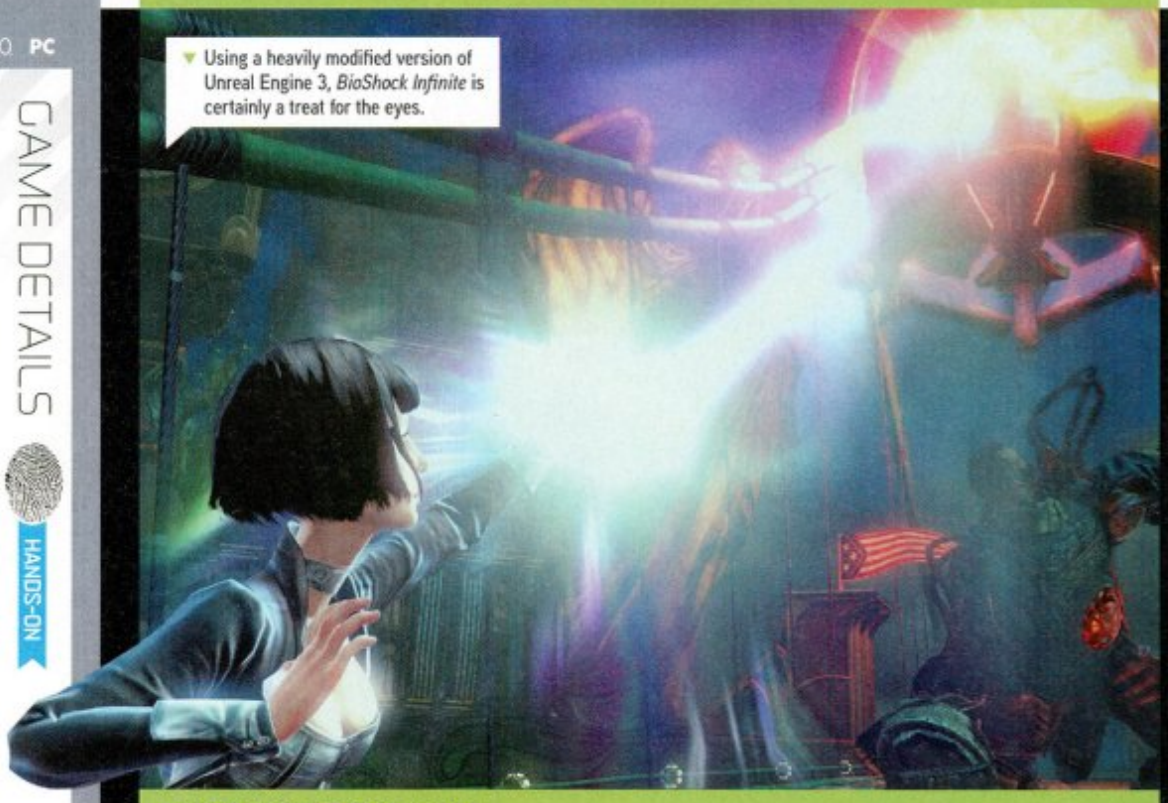
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBA

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
2012

SUITABLE FOR
Thrill seekers, history buffs, and everyone in between

HANDS-ON



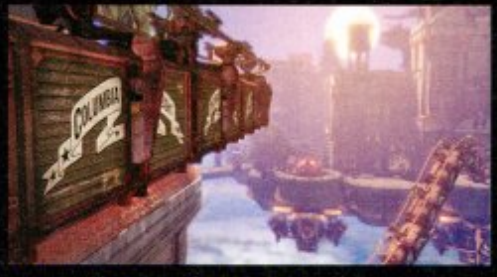
▼ Using a heavily modified version of Unreal Engine 3, *BioShock Infinite* is certainly a treat for the eyes.

CHARACTER STUDY

You'll step inside the leather boots of Booker DeWitt, a former Pinkerton detective turned private bounty hunter (of sorts). Sent to Columbia by an unnamed and wealthy client, DeWitt find himself looking for a woman named Elizabeth, who will ultimately become his compatriot throughout the adventure. You learn that Elizabeth was raised in Columbia's flying fortress: At times during the demo she's a damsel in distress, but at other times she will support you in combat. You were sent to Columbia to rescue her, and once you learn of her supernatural powers, she becomes an indispensible aid. At one point in the demo, for instance, Elizabeth summons a storm cloud over a large group of enemies. This is DeWitt's cue to channel electricity, setting off a lightning storm above the crowd.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The original *BioShock* is quite fun, but our all-time fave is Levine's earlier classic, *System Shock 2* (PC). Go say hi to The Many!



THE VIEW FROM UP HIGH

The look of Columbia is pure Americana. One of its most distinctive features, however, is something rather un-American: good public transportation. The Skyline is a series of sky-train rails that go from one city "block" to the next. Even cooler, Skyline can be used by people: Latch onto it with a steel clip and you're off. Presumably, mastering the Skyline will be essential, in terms of both getting around and combat strategy.

THE MULTIPLAYER ISSUE

Sky-high expectations

At the moment, Irrational Games has not committed to including a multiplayer mode in *BioShock Infinite*. Though the team is experimenting with multiplayer ideas, Levine has stated that they will only go forward with such a mode if they can achieve something significantly unique that sets it apart from the genre's leaders. Good on 'em, I say.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Atmosphere is incredibly rich, full of historical parallels and insights
- ❤ Full of innovative gameplay ideas

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ It's not out until 2012
- ✖ Irrational Games has not committed to including a multiplayer mode

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01 BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

Action, adventure, and stealth: These three great components are rarely all present in the same game, but they're the core of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. You play as billionaire-turned-superhero Bruce Wayne as he responds to a call for help on the island sanitarium. Run, jump, and glide your way around all while fighting off well-established villains from the *Batman* universe (and their many henchmen), including Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, Scarecrow, and The Joker! Defeat your opponents, solve the puzzles, and get out alive—then leap into the Challenge Mode for even more gameplay. If you missed this modern classic before, don't let it pass you by again.

02 ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

Being stealthy, solitary, and feared is always a fun combination. But what's more fun than executing missions (or people) with a couple of friends to help carry the load? *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* follows in Ubisoft's long line of great games that put you in the leather shoes of world-class assassin Ezio Auditore. With an emphasis on open-world gameplay, there are always many foes to fight, and a new system that enables you to recruit new members into Ezio's brotherhood adds to the gameplay. Go forth, arm yourself with deadly weapons, and continue the rich story of Ezio and Desmond. And, best of all, do it on the cheap!

03 KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Asked to name a famous pair, Kane & Lynch may not land on as many lists as Abbott & Costello, Romeo & Juliet, or Sonny & Cher, but they might take the crown for Most Deadly Duo. This action-packed sequel features a new visual style that's meant to keep you on the edge of your seat as you work your way through Shanghai's perilous streets...which you can do alone or in co-op with a friend. If you'd prefer to work against your buddies, crank up the Fragile Alliance multiplayer mode where you're rewarded for sabotaging your friends. Just be sure to time it right: too early and you'll be on the lam for an extended period, too late and someone else may reap the rewards by turning traitor first.

04 SINGULARITY

Military experiments are often thought to end with grotesque results, but in the game world, they end up producing the means for...time travel. *Singularity* puts you on a fictional island where a lab catastrophe has caused a "singularity" so nasty that the Russian government covered up the island's existence. When an electromagnetic surge damages a U.S. spy satellite, a military recon team is sent to investigate...and the fun begins. *Singularity* enables you to move objects forwards and backwards in time, and if you're the type of person who wishes to use your powers for evil, you can channel your efforts into a powerful blast capable of taking out the fiercest foes.

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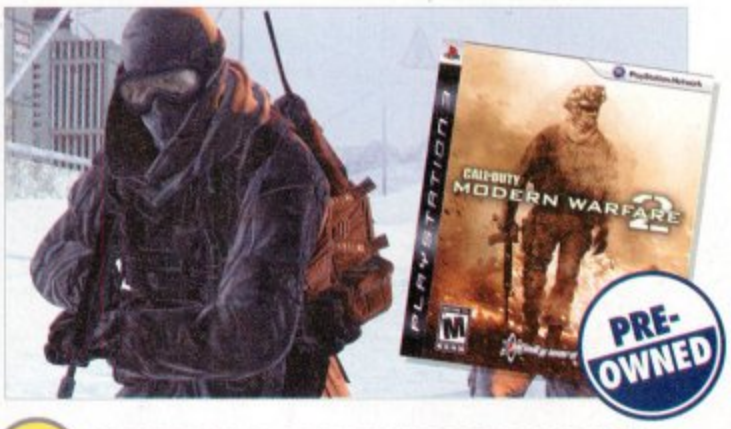
05 MICHAEL JACKSON: THE EXPERIENCE

If you've ever danced (whether as a joke or "for real"), there's a 99.9% chance that you've done (or tried to do) a move made famous by Michael Jackson. Why not take that accidental ability straight to the virtual dance floor and unleash your inner pop star with *Michael Jackson: The Experience?* Dance along to many of the King of Pop's biggest hits, including "Bad," "Beat It," "Smooth Criminal," and "Billie Jean." Engage in some head-to-head (foot-to-foot?) action with up to three of your friends. Dust off your slickest jet-black fedora and prepare to get your groove on to some of the biggest songs from the biggest artist ever to grace the concert stage.

06 KINGDOM HEARTS RE:CODED

Combining Square Enix's RPG world and Disney's cartoon characters has been extremely successful in the past, and the latest title in the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, *Re:coded*, is no exception. *Kingdom Hearts coded*'s rich story has been ported to the Nintendo DS unchanged, but its great gameplay has been revamped to take advantage of the DS's features. If you're already familiar with the series, it plays like a mix of *Birth by Sleep* and *358/2 Days*...and, of course, the original title, *coded*. If, however, you're worried a handheld RPG might not be your thing, we'll tell you that the game's blend of puzzle-game and action-RPG elements makes it accessible to players of all skill levels.



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08 BUY ONE PC VALUE TITLE, GET ONE FREE

At any given time there are a ton of great PC games available, but choosing the right one can be somewhat challenging. Do you get the latest and greatest real-time strategy game and pass on the new first-person shooter? Do you get last year's single-player sleeper hit and skip the chance to play with all your friends online? There's no need to worry about that anymore. The fine folks at your local Best Buy have you covered, thanks to their new PC value program. Now, when you buy one PC value title, you get another PC value title absolutely free! Instead of deliberating between two great titles, just get both. Just make sure that it has the value sticker on the box, and you'll be good to go!

DiRT3

What in the world is Gymkhana? • Words: William O'Neal

I first visited Codemasters' Southam, England studio in 2000. Back then their Colin McRae-inspired rally games were all the rage. While there's no doubt that Colin McRae put European-style rally racing on the map, his untimely demise in 2007 (a helicopter accident) left the world of rally racing in desperate need of an heir apparent. Enter Ken Block. The founder of DC Shoes, Ken Block got hooked on the skids and drifts of rally racing and eventually invented a discipline of his own, Gymkhana. Part rally cross, part rally racing, part sideshow, and part skateboarding discipline, Gymkhana is an upcoming sport where drivers compete in obstacle courses showing how well they can manipulate their cars by jumping, doing donuts, and drifting. While Gymkhana is the exciting new feature in *DiRT3*, hardcore rally fans can rest assured. According to the game's developers, *DiRT3* is still 60% straight-up rally racing.

DiRT3 pretty much picks up where *DiRT2* left off. You've "graduated" from the beat-up RV that was your hub in *DiRT2* and now operate out of the DC Compound, where you're basically an action-sports athlete. At the compound you'll hone your skills in an open area that's reminiscent of freeplay areas in skateboarding games. A veritable playground for stunts and drifts, this is where you'll practice skills and tricks before meeting up with your friends via split-screen or online play.

Since *DiRT3* is essentially a rally game, purists will be stoked at the attention to detail that Codemasters has put into *DiRT3*'s rally modes. One of the issues with a game like *DiRT3* is making it appeal to hardcore rally fans and more casual users alike. With that in mind the team's vision statement for developing the game was two-fold: While the more Euro-focused pro rally racing is at the core of the game, the whole "come play in the dirt" mantra offers a more American-friendly message. With more than 100 rally tracks, a variety of car types and incredible physics, even the most hardcore rally fan will be impressed.

Of course, Codemasters also wants to ensure that the game is accessible and fun, so *DiRT3* introduces split-screen gameplay into the series. The game also features several new party modes, such as Tag and Cat and Mouse. The team calls the latter *DiRT3*'s "20 minutes before the pub" feature, as you can just jump in and play for just a bit, if you like.

All told, *DiRT3* is a promising racing game, and if Codemasters has its way it should please both hardcore and casual players alike.

GYMKHANA

Ken Block's supercharged Ford Fiesta is your trusty steed as you go about mastering the art of Gymkhana. This baby puts out more than 600BHP, and you'll be using all of those horses to jump over obstacles, drift, and slide around the DC Compound.

▲ What's the point if you're not sliding like a maniac?

▲ High-end cars have jump buttons now. It's true.

▲ You're doin' it wrong if traffic is rushing you head-on.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

DIRT3

INFO
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters Racing Studio
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Online, split-screen

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
Q2 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Driving simulator junkies and fans of rally racing

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Since DiRT3 doesn't arrive until mid-2011, fans of the genre should run out and play DiRT2.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- A pure rally game with some fun elements
- Immaculately rendered cars
- Gymkhana is awesome

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- The learning curve can be steep
- The focus on Gymkhana may turn off purists

LET'S PLAY IN THE SNOW!
Hardcore racing fans screamed for it and the developers at Codemasters delivered. Fans of the series will be stoked that snow is now among the game's many racing surfaces.

MORE SURFACES MEANS MORE SETUP

Now that *DiRT3* boasts snow, you'll have to pay even more attention to how you setup your cars. The game rocks a ton of setup options, including spiked tires, and you can even adjust tire pressure for added traction.

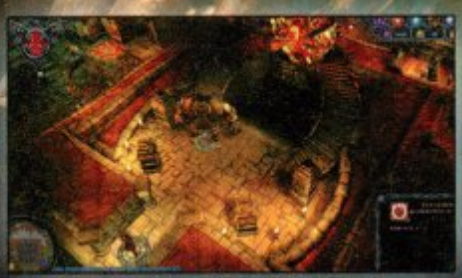
COMPETITION IS KING

While straight-up rally racing makes up 60% of the game, those of us on this side of the pond will spend a lot of time participating in Gymkhana competitions. Once you hone your skills in the DC Compound you can thrill fans in arenas like the one found in this Monster Energy competition. Another cool feature is the ability to upload your best performances to YouTube from within the game.

DUNGEONS

BEING EVIL HAS NEVER FELT SO GOOD!

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
www.esrb.org



"I can't wait for Dungeons' release."
- GameInformer

"The type of game hardcore PC gamers eat up."
- IGN

"Time to brush up on my sinister laughter."
- Bitmob

Coming February 2011
www.dungeons-game.com

REALMFORGE

kalypso

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Games for Windows

Either the character models are highly stylized or The Ark requires a legion of plastic surgeons and chiropractors.

BRINK

Is Bethesda's high-tech shooter on the brink of being the next big thing?

Words: Tom Price

So many shooters, so little time. Considering all the big shooter franchises that've seen new releases lately, or soon will—think *Call of Duty*, *Killzone*, *SOCOM* and *Ghost Recon*—I can't help but worry that original new properties like Splash Damage's *Brink* might be overlooked. It'd be too bad if *Brink* were to get lost in the shuffle, because it has the potential to revolutionize first-person shooters.

What's so revolutionary about *Brink* is not the hyper-realized "toon" style of its art direction; that just makes the game look really cool and unique. And it's not the parkour-influenced S.M.A.R.T. movement system, which admittedly does add a special component to the gunplay by opening up the way you move around the world. These features are compelling, but not revolutionary.

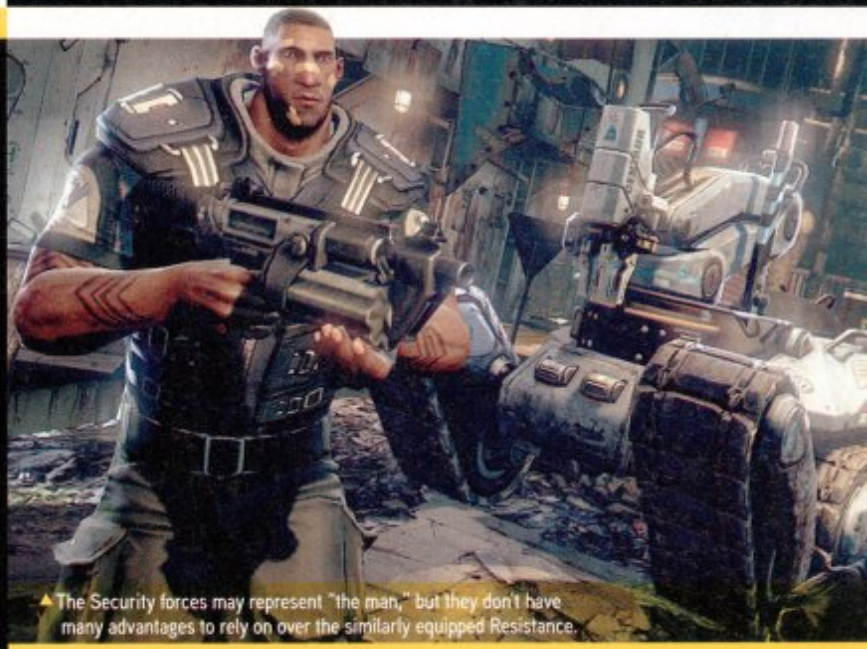
What should really set *Brink* apart is its blurring of the lines between multiplayer and single-player, which will likely be copied by numerous shooters in the years to come. *Brink* is a multiplayer experience at its core, yet it's built around a flexible narrative. The many branching paths in its mission structure give you numerous ways to experience it. As the story goes, two opposing teams—Resistance and Security—are fighting for control of the Ark, a floating city of the future built to house refugees from rising seas. Whether you're playing alone or with a full contingent of 16, you're always fighting in teams of eight in objective-based multiplayer arenas.

The variety in those objectives is another way *Brink* keeps it interesting: You need to do more than just kill the opposing team to complete the main task of each level. You can also split off and take on side missions at any time, either by yourself or with a couple teammates. Sometimes these side missions will have an effect on the main mission going on elsewhere, but they'll always earn you experience points you can spend on upgrades for your highly customizable character.

Brink follows a lot of the conventions of team-based shooters, offering different classes with specific skills, like engineers and medics. But the branching paths and overall narrative structure—which will vary greatly depending on which side you're playing—signal the coming of something truly different to the world of online gaming. Experienced shooter fans should appreciate *Brink*'s innovations, which will stand in contrast to the many carbon-copy iterations of best-selling shooters that are out there right now.

WAR FOR THE FUTURE

If videogames are to be believed, the future is going to be awful. After a worldwide environmental collapse, a once-shining example of a progressive utopia—the artifical island known as "The Ark"—finds itself falling apart due to an influx of refugees, straining the island's limited resources. Bad conditions give rise to a police state run by the "Security," which subsequently leads to the "Resistance." These two forces will fight for control of the Ark, if not for the future of humanity itself.



▲ The Security forces may represent "the man," but they don't have many advantages to rely on over the similarly equipped Resistance.

▲ FOUNDER'S TOWER
The "nice" end of the island, Security forces must keep Resistance from making it all the way to the heart.

▲ AMBUSH
This is the bad part of town where Resistance has its greatest foothold. S.M.A.R.T. will come in handy here.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

BRINK

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Splash Damage
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
8v8 online, co-operative

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
Spring 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Shooter fans who can't make up their mind between single- and multiplayer

Movin': The S.M.A.R.T. system lets you find new paths to (or from) the enemy.

GAMEPLAY \\

GET S.M.A.R.T.

Smooth Movement Across Random Terrain is a perfectly descriptive—if not totally acronym-worthy—name for the parkour-like movements you'll bust out as you battle your way through *Brink*. As in many shooters, you'll still use cover for its tactical advantages, but you'll also jam through areas designed for acrobatic action because it looks cool and it's fun, and that's more important than sober squad tactics any day of the week. The levels in *Brink* are designed from the ground up to allow the S.M.A.R.T. system to work smoothly, which is kind of its whole point.

Stylin': Character customization makes the teams and individual players more identifiable in battle.

▲ Engineers can plop down turrets, which are good for defense. They can also hide behind them like the cowards they are.

▲ This fellow demonstrates the cotton candy gun, which produces delicious confections. His enemy falls: carb overload!

RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

Brink immediately invites comparisons to Team Fortress 2, not just because of its "toony" art style, but for its use of player classes with different skill sets. The classes in *Brink* share some parallels with those of TF2. Engineers, Soldiers and Medics all do expected things like fixing stuff, fixing people, dropping turrets, and dropping ammo. Likewise, the Spy-like Operatives operate behind enemy lines and not only hack the other side's equipment, but interrogate downed enemies for crucial intel.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

It's crazy to think that there are people who haven't played Team Fortress 2 yet...Have these poor souls really lived? If this is you, get thee to a capable PC, pronto.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Truly innovative approach to blending single- and multiplayer
- ❤ Awesomely original art style

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Original games are always a bit of a crapshoot, especially when it's a developer's first crack

▲ The upgraded graphics will give you a better view of Pokémons' butts.

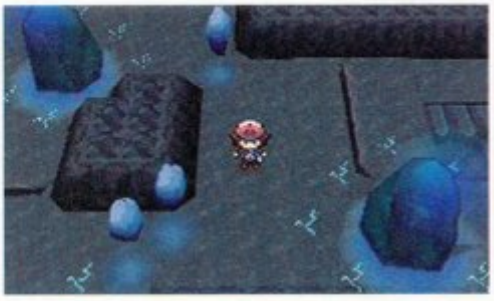
POKÉMON BLACK/WHITE

What's black and white, and ~~red~~ played all over? • Words: Andy Eddy

Nintendo and developer Game Freak have been preparing a big debut for the new line of Pokémon titles, Black and White. Though the games came out in Japan last September, the companies are busy localizing them, as a full reworking of the story and dialogue is required.

What we'll see when the games hit these shores is much the same refined gameplay and exciting new features that Japanese players got last fall. As these are typical Pokémon games, you once again play the part of a trainer seeking to gather up the full complement of pocket monsters that exist in the world through battles and leveling up, all handled in traditional JRPG fashion.

Among the new aspects are seasonal effects, some of which impact the gameplay (snowdrifts, for example, become ramps to normally inaccessible areas) and drastically expanded community features,



which enable quick connections with either nearby players (or those across the globe) for battles, trading, and more.

With estimates of over 40 hours to "beat" the game—and still more gameplay after you do beat it—is there any question that Pokémon collectors should book vacation time for early March? The proof is as clear as black and white.

GOTTA GET SOME MORE

Pokémon Black/White offers a fresh lineup of 150 Pokémon to collect, though, as before, not all can be captured in one version of the game. To fill your Pokédex, you'll need to trade with others who own the other game. And once you finish the adventure, you'll unlock the ability to import any Pokémon from previously released games.

THOUGH THE GAMES CAME OUT IN JAPAN LAST SEPTEMBER, THE COMPANIES ARE BUSY LOCALIZING THEM.

DS

GAME DETAILS

POKÉMON BLACK/WHITE

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak
Platforms: DS

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2 players online or locally

GENRE
RPG

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who's ever had an interest in Pokémon

HANDS-ON

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you're looking to get back into a Pokémon trainer's state of mind, check out either Pokémon HeartGold or SoulSilver. They're still a little expensive, but worth the money!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Greatly expanded communications enable more player-to-player action
- ❤ Revamped game visuals are far less "flat"

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Really...another 150 to find?!
- ✖ The move/battle gameplay can be monotonous

▼ Chris Redfield and Viewtiful Joe join Ryu on the Capcom side.

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3
FATE OF TWO WORLDS

A new generation brings fresh faces to the Marvel vs. Capcom universe • Words: Heather Bartron

▲ Series vet Doctor Doom is backed by Dormammu and Super-Skrull.

UPDATED GRAPHICS

Capcom knows no limits, a statement it's proven with every entry in the *MvC* series. That said, *Fate of Two Worlds* surpasses the graphical limitations of previous titles. Characters are now rendered in 3D, creating the feeling of a "living, breathing comic book."

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds starts out on the right foot by bringing back perennial favorites Wolverine, Captain America, Morrigan, and Ryu. On the other hand, characters like Mega Man and, my personal favorite, Ruby Heart, haven't yet made the cut. Since Fate of Two Worlds currently offers half the characters of the previous game—the sharp HD graphics require new artwork—some new faces take up the slack. After a good 10 years we'll finally be seeing the likes of Deadpool, Chris Redfield, Dormammu, Trish, Amaterasu, and Dante. While many die-hard fans would gladly trade Chris for another round with Mega Man, we can't deny looking forward to doling out some pain, demon-style, as Dante.

"Whoa, you're a real hero, for real?" For real. Out of all the new characters, Viewtiful Joe will most likely steal the limelight. Relying on an arsenal of bombs and boomerangs, Joe's play style is similar to Link in Smash Bros. What really takes him to the next level is a larger-than-life gun, cocked and ready to unleash a world of hurt. Joe's off-the-wall humor and "VFX Powers" fit perfectly into a series already rich with explosions and a flock of fan favorites.

The series-defining assist feature returns, letting you call out a buddy to double up on the pain. This time out a new air combo button simplifies the application of mid-air beatdowns, letting you call in allies while you collectively pummel your foe into the heliosphere.

Along with the new graphics come new controls. They've been distilled down to simply low, mid, and high attacks mapped across three buttons. The barebones control scheme should help to attract newcomers who are typically discouraged by complicated Capcom control systems. This could lead to an onslaught of button-mashers upon the game's release, but it won't be anything veteran players can't handle.

Marvel vs. Capcom 3 encompasses two universes rich with solid personalities, but the sheer number of available characters to draw from serves as a double-edged sword for Fate of Two Worlds. As an avid fan of both franchises, I wanted all of my favorites in. At the same time, for every Spider-Man fan there are two Wolverine maniacs. While 30 characters doesn't seem like a lot to choose from, the fact remains that there will still be plenty of fan-favorite treasures to find and play as.

▲ Dormammu: Far worse than a demon, with heat and power only a god of his own universe could dream of.

▲ He may be pint-sized but Viewtiful Joe fights more like he's gallon-sized.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3: FATE OF TWO WORLDS

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Platforms: PS 3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Head-to-head play, local and online

GENRE
Fighting

RELEASE DATE
February 15, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
MvC2 freaks and casual fans who enjoy epic lightshows

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Train for *MvC3* with the Street Fighter side of Capcom in the action-packed *Super Street Fighter IV*. It's heavily discounted these days but its fighting action still reigns supreme.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fast-paced action
- ❤ Cleverly stylized graphics

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Unlockable alternate costumes would be the icing on the cake, if only they existed
- ✖ The ~30 character roster feels a bit small after *MvC2*'s massive 56

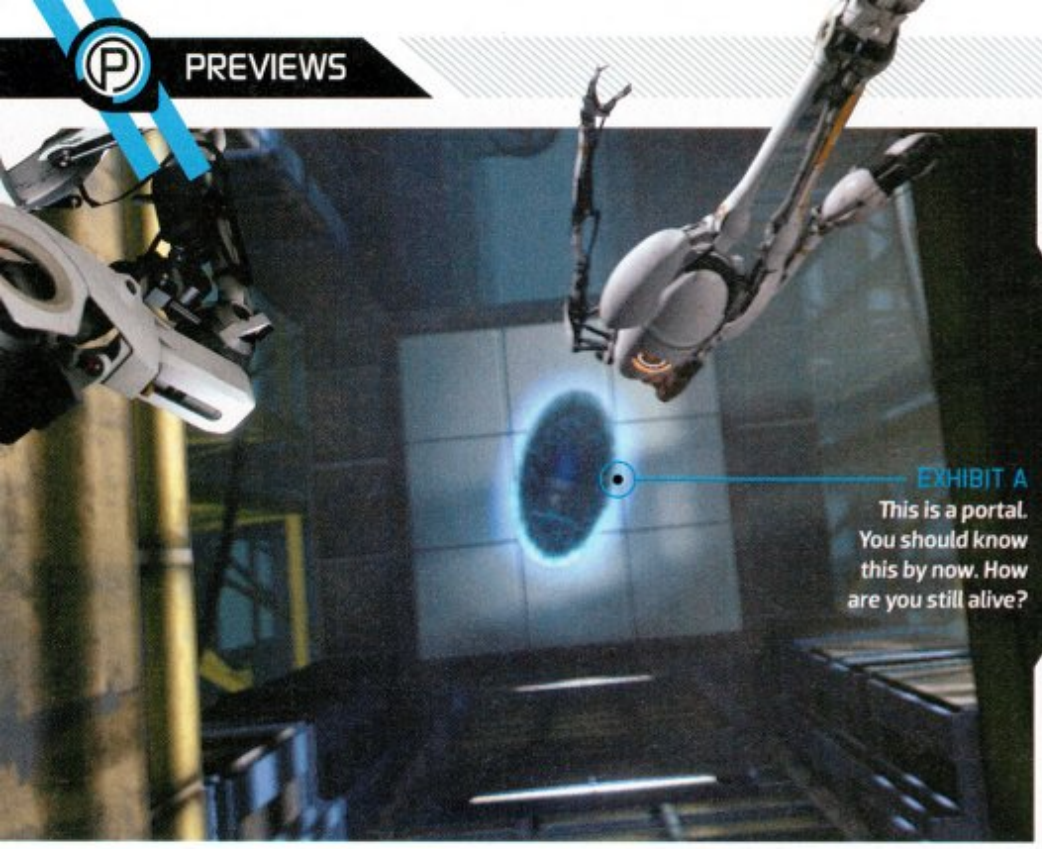
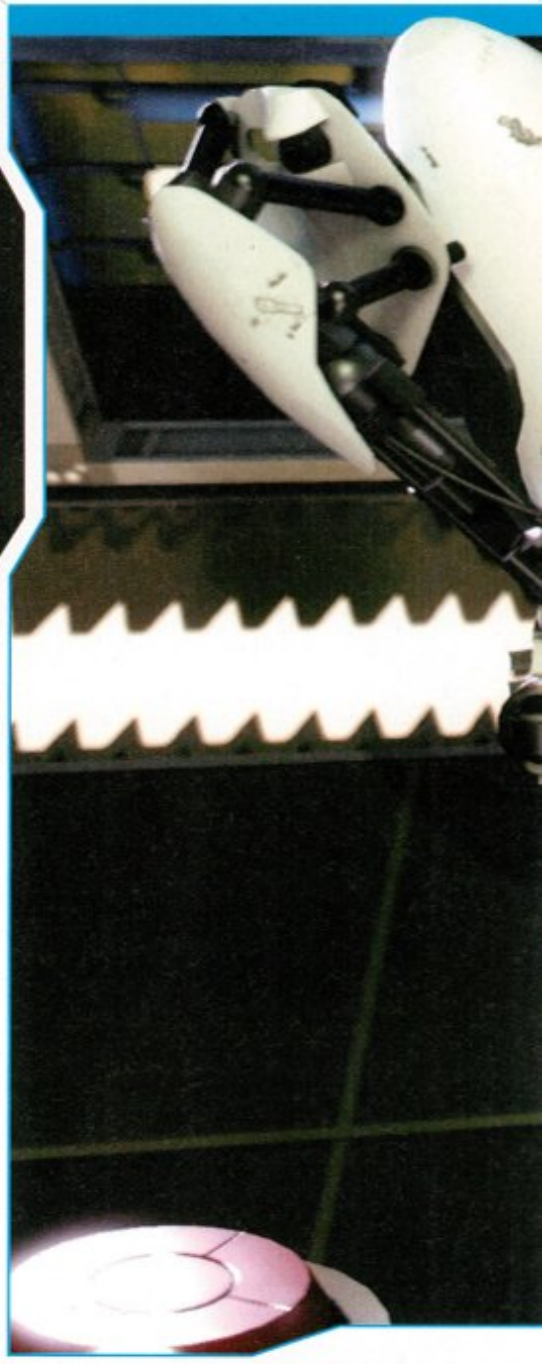


EXHIBIT A
This is a portal. You should know this by now. How are you still alive?



PORTAL 2

When one door closes another one opens... • Words: Tom Price

If you're any kind of serious fan of Portal, the little pack-in puzzle game that shipped as a part of Valve's best-selling The Orange Box, then you've done one or all of the following things: owned a plushy Companion Cube, learned all the lyrics to "Still Alive" (and performed it on an accordion), got an Aperture Science tattoo, or gone to a Jonathan Coulton concert. With all the cute pop culture crossovers Portal has endured from nerd-gamer-hipsters, it's a wonder anyone ever took the time to actually play the game.

All the cute memes like "the cake is a lie" and GLaDOS singing are great, but the game's unique challenges are what made it so popular in the first place, and should drive everyone who played and enjoyed the first game to rush out and buy Portal 2. Featuring a slew of new physics-defying toys to help you solve such inconveniences as gravity and walls, Portal 2 will offer both a full-length single-player story and a distinct cooperative narrative wherein you and a friend have to combine your puzzling skills to solve a set of new levels. Given the quality of the original, Portal 2 is easily one of the most exciting games to look forward to in 2011.

As for the storyline, a good deal of time has passed since player-character Chell first woke up in an Aperture Science Labs containment unit and subsequently escaped the facility after defeating GLaDOS, the artificial intelligence that ran the joint. The lab is a semi-ruin overgrown with weeds and vines, but GLaDOS is back online and fixing the place up for another tortuous traversal. The puzzles will be more complex—some seemingly insurmountable, no doubt—but with all those new gadgets to play with, not to mention some help from a few friendly AIs, you should find yourself back home and eating cake in no time at all. Unless you die, of course.

IN-GAME \\

▲ ADVENTURES IN TECHNOLOGY
The new toys in Portal 2 should add some interesting wrinkles. The Excursion Funnel establishes a tunnel between two portals through real space that can carry you or an object. The Aerial Faith Plates (upper left) are a series of launch pads, while the Thermal Discouragement Beam (upper right) lets you redirect potentially deadly energy beams. Finally, the Pneumatic Diversity Vent acts like a big vacuum that can suck things through a portal. Imagining possibilities yet?

Cooperative mode has you and a pal playing as two mechanical denizens of the lab: a turret gun and a personality core outfitted with some legs. No names yet, but may I suggest some? Thank you. How about Wil and Andy?

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

PORTAL 2

INFO
Publisher: Valve Software
Developer: Valve Software
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Mac

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two-player cooperative

GENRE
Puzzle

RELEASE DATE
April 21, 2011

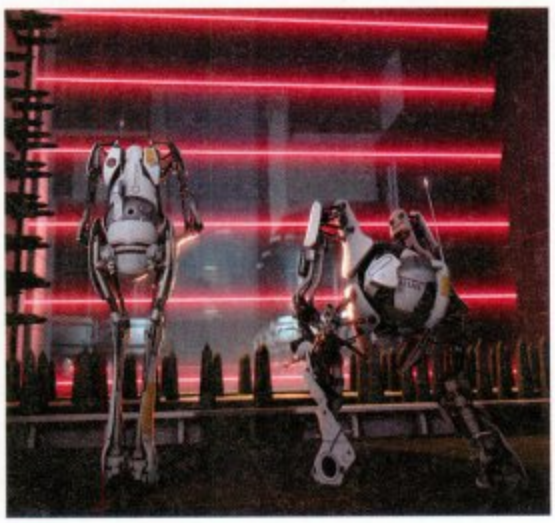
SUITABLE FOR
Physics professors and lay people, cake haters

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Assuming you've actually played the first one, it might be a fun idea to check out Tag: The Power of Paint. It's free to download and play on your PC: Just Google it.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Cooperative mode is going to be fun
- ❤ New painting system along with other puzzle-solving enhancements should require much more creative thinking

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Apparently there really won't be any cake this time. Pie?



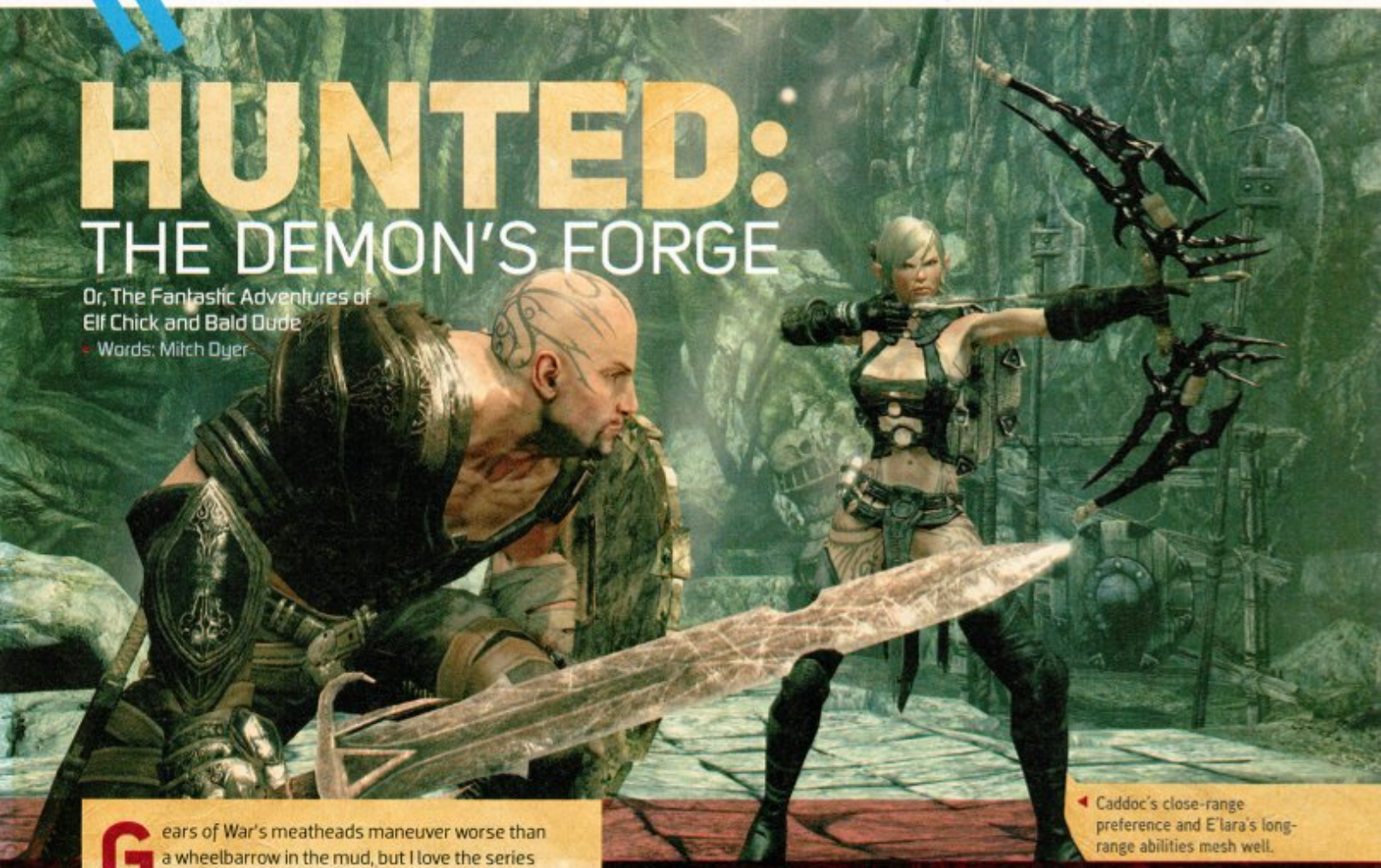
PAINT IT FAST

Another new aspect of the game could turn the action completely on its head. Portal 2 will feature a system of gels, which can coat surfaces with and imbue them with physics-changing qualities. Repulsion Gel makes you bounce higher, Propulsion Gel increases your speed as you run across it, and so on. The concept comes from an indie game called Tag: The Power of Paint, developed as a student project at Digipen. Any homework assignment that ends up getting you a job at Valve Software deserves an A+.

HUNTED: THE DEMON'S FORGE

Or, The Fantastic Adventures of Elf Chick and Bald Dude

Words: Mitch Dyer



Caddoc's close-range preference and E'lara's long-range abilities mesh well.

Gears of War's meatheads maneuver worse than a wheelbarrow in the mud, but I love the series anyway. Its world is gorgeous, its combat feels great, and you can play the entire thing with a friend. It's a shallow comparison, but you can't describe *Hunted: The Demon's Forge* more accurately than a Dungeons & Dragons spin on Epic's renowned third-person shooter.

In some ways, this familiarity hurts *Hunted*—I'm a little tired of action games using cover as their sole source of "innovation," but I can't deny how well it works. I still dig tucking into a wall and shooting baddies in the teeth, and that's just what *Hunted* is all about.

As Caddoc the sword-wielding fella or E'lara the lady-elf bowcaster, you'll team up with a friend to shoot arrows, cast spells, and swing swords at armies of skeletons and other familiar fantasy fodder. The combat, particularly the bow-and-arrow ranged stuff, feels solid already. Attacks hit hard and they feel great. What little close-combat clunkiness exists, mostly thanks to the naturally sluggish movement of this sort of game, will be cleaned up in the months leading up to its release, I suspect.

While I couldn't see much of the game—I played just one combat segment—I'm excited to see where *Hunted* goes. Its new fantasy world is heavy on the dark themes, and gorgeous despite its ugly enemies and dilapidated battlefields.

I'm more than alright with another excellent third-person action game, and with a hint of role-playing character progression—collectable crystals are the currency of choice—*Hunted: The Demon's Forge* could be a great complement or appetizer to *Dragon Age 2*.

SWITCH IT UP

I didn't see anything this big and ugly during my demo, but I already want it dead.

Right there? You're looking at at least $900 for initial consult and cleaning, then $10k for the bridge work.

If you're tired of covering your close-combat compadre, don't sweat it. Hunted lets you switch up which character you're playing as during the co-op campaign. Both players stand in the designated circles and press a button to reverse roles. This is particularly useful perk if your bud just isn't up to wielding that bow. Let me show you how it's done...

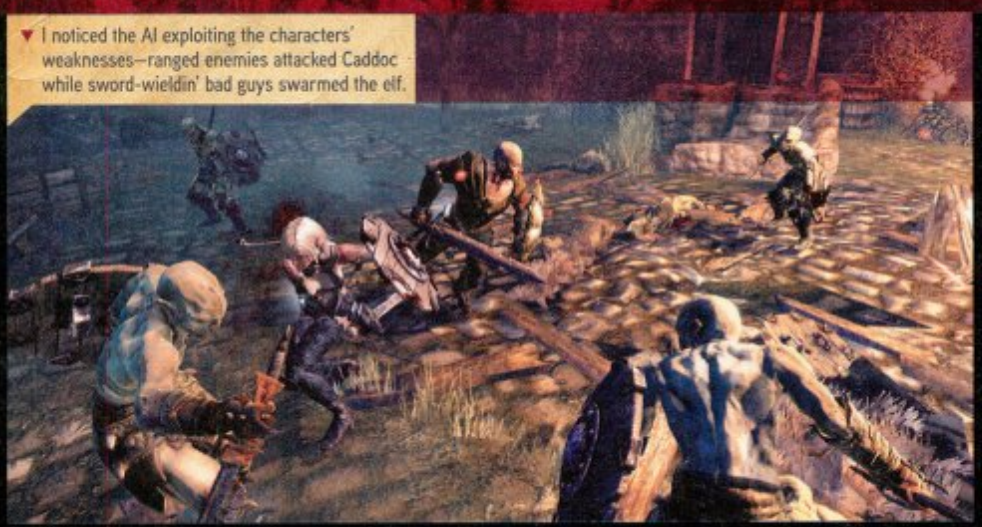
EXPECT A D&D SPIN ON EPIC'S RENOWNED GEARS OF WAR SERIES

E'LARA HAS MELEE WEAPONS, IT'S JUST THAT HER BOW IS WAY BETTER.

CHOOSE WISELY

Hunted's numerous pre-order bonuses include a lot of legitimately cool stuff, such as magical artifacts to improve attack power, fancy armor modifiers, character skins, unlockable boss battles, and new swords and bows. There's a lot of great stuff on offer across a lot of different retail outlets. Personally, I'm all about using repeating cross-bows and big honkin' axes.

▼ I noticed the AI exploiting the characters' weaknesses—ranged enemies attacked Caddoc while sword-wieldin' bad guys swarmed the elf.



WORK IT (TOGETHER)

Caddoc and E'lara cooperate in more ways than simply fighting alongside each other. Caddoc can hit his partner with a blast of magic to imbue her arrows with, say, electric power, which adds extra oomph to her attacks. He can also levitate foes and hold them in place for her to take down. The fighting is so frantic that you'll have to time these moves wisely, though.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

HUNTED:
THE DEMON'S FORGE

HANDS-ON

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda
Developer: inExile
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two-player co-op

GENRE
Action-RPG

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Gears of War fans who pine over its low elf-to-human ratio

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you just can't wait to get a healthy dose of fantasy action, make sure to hit up Enslaved! It was once our game of the month, after all.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ It's made for co-op
- ❤ Great graphics, dark setting
- ❤ Hard-hitting attacks feel good

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Everything about it is a little too familiar
- ✖ Have you seen that thing's teeth?

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2011: A LOOK AHEAD

Words: Mitch Dyer

Wow, man. 2010 was a great year for games, wasn't it? Bayonetta, Battlefield, and Mass Effect 2 gave it a strong start, not to mention strong support from Red Dead Redemption, Enslaved, and Black Ops. It'd take a lot of amazing stuff for 2011 to trump that lineup. Thankfully, "a lot of amazing stuff" is exactly what's in store for gamers in the coming months. We've got sequels, the return of familiar favorites and the revitalization of series we'd long thought dead. This is on top of one of the generation's most exciting new pieces of hardware and some incredible new IPs. It's gonna be another great year, friends.

GEARS OF WAR 3

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Epic Games • Release Date: Winter 2011

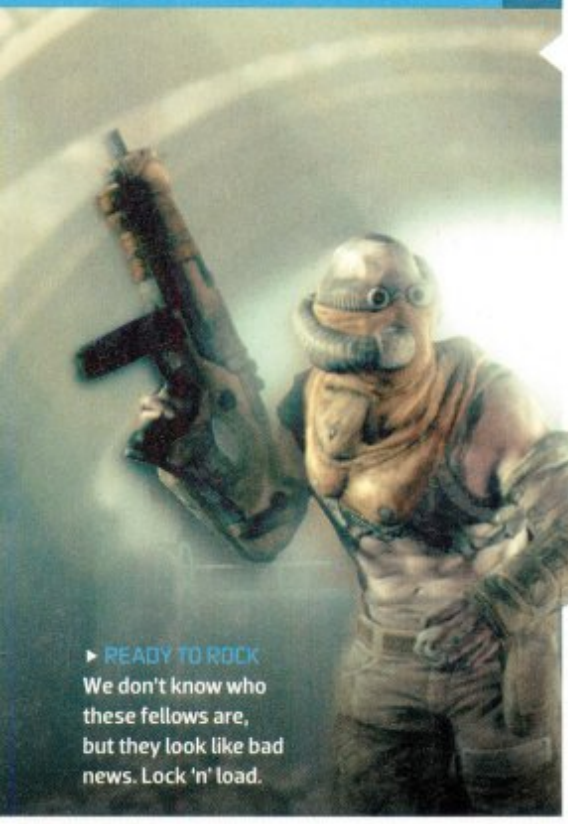
Gears of War represents everything we should despise about videogames these days. It's a third-person, cover-based, over-the-shoulder shooter starring steroid-pumping space marines. We'd yawn if everything about Gears 3—burly meatheads included—didn't rev our engines. But it does the over-the-shoulder stuff so well! As much as we're excited to play four-player co-op against an army of new big bads, the Horde-alike Beast Mode is where it's at. Playing as increasingly powerful Locust rules, as does the Kantus' ability to raise the dead. And hunting an army of COG soldiers is delicious.

The big downside with Gears of War 3 is that Epic's other upcoming FPS, Bulletstorm, is taking center stage for the first half of 2011, which pushed Gears 3 to the holidays. Bulletstorm is a big player in the online multiplayer arena, so Epic is intelligently avoiding hurting itself by spreading the games out. Despite the delay from April to the holidays, we'll all get a taste for each other's blood when Gears of War 3's multiplayer beta kicks off in early 2011.

◀ WAITING... Bulletstorm will delay these folks for a bit.

RAGE

Publisher: Bethesda •
Developer: id Software •
Release Date: September 13, 2011



▸ READY TO ROCK
We don't know who these fellows are, but they look like bad news. Lock 'n' load.

▸ ROLL OUT!
Wild vehicular combat will be a big part of *Rage*.

It's tough to talk about *Rage* without acknowledging how ludicrously good-looking it is because, well, that's all the world really knows about it. Fortunately, we all got a small taste of what to expect from the id Tech 5 engine's graphical prowess when *Rage HD* hit the iPhone and iPad in late 2010. It's so impressive on Apple's mobile devices that we're stoked to see it on a gigantic HDTV.

Interestingly, *Rage* will ship on at least two DVDs on Xbox 360, which fits into an increasingly common pattern we've seen with *Mass Effect 2* and *Dead Space 2*—hey, whatever it takes to give us great games, right? What separates the handheld edition from its console cousin is that it neglects the interesting world we're excited to sink our teeth into, as well as any semblance of story—it just has you blowing away fugly fools with dilapidated weapons in similarly dilapidated buildings. It's a start, though. Bits and pieces of *Rage*'s post-apocalypse suggest what a *Fallout* / *Borderlands*' lovechild might look like—the loony characters, in particular.

If you're aching to see more of what John Carmack and company have to offer with *Rage* this fall, keep an eye on the iTunes App Store for a follow-up iOS game in the *Rage* universe. This sequel will center on the car combat, which will be as crucial to *Rage* as its first-person shooting.

▸ A FRESH FACE
You'll get to play as the Locust in *Gears 3*'s new multiplayer modes.

BRINK

Publisher: Bethesda • Developer: Splash Damage • Release Date: Spring 2011

We're all about objective-based multiplayer, and Brink's rapidly changing, on-the-fly missions give you a sense of purpose beyond "kill those dudes." The eight-player online co-op campaign even feels like online multiplayer, albeit with a story pushing you and your pals forward.

Its interesting approach to first-person platforming has us stoked, too. Like a mixture of Assassin's Creed and Mirror's Edge, Brink's one-button, contextual hippity-hopping enables easy access to elevated objectives and quick routes back down to the battlefield. Splash Damage's unique art style is another welcome dose of originality. Above all else, though, it's the personal customization that gets us revved up—hook us up with the cowboy hat and Kevlar!

HOMEFRONT

Publisher: THQ • Developer: Kaos • Release Date: March 8, 2011

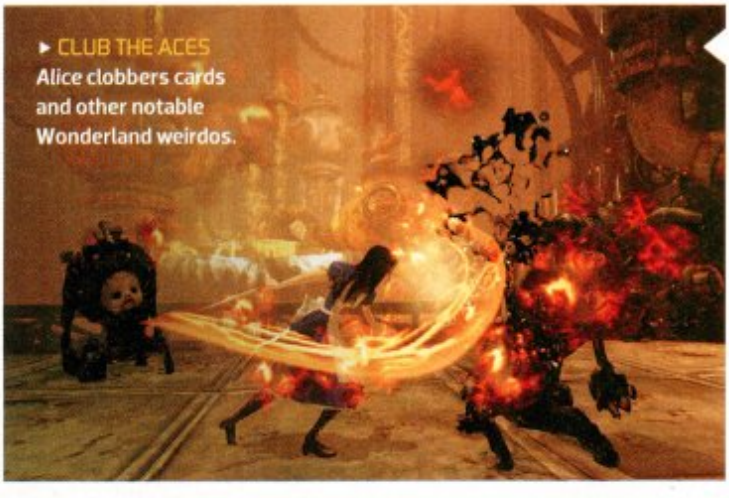
If shooters set in the post-apocalypse or the war-torn Middle East are starting to wear thin on you, Homefront's invaded-America scenario could be the perfect remedy. Developer Kaos aims to balance an emotional story and thrilling action sequences. Rallying resistance members from your neighborhood and taking the fight to the nearest enemy-occupied Wal-Mart sounds reasonably believable. Homefront's cool scripted sequences involving car crashes, crumbling towers and near-miss explosions make Modern Warfare's big wow moments look tame, and its multiplayer—featuring earned currency to buy bigger guns or vehicles mid-match—might be enough to pull us away from Call of Duty and Battlefield for a while.

▸ DEFEND THE HOMELAND
Prepare to fight against invading forces on U.S. soil.

TWISTED METAL

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Eat Sleep Play • Release Date: Fall 2011

Car combat games, sadly, sort of died with the PlayStation 2. Leave it to Twisted Metal and Calling All Cars veteran David Jaffe to revive his bread and butter. Hindsight shows that unforgivably bad controls and rudimentary level design make the series tough to return to, but 2011's Twisted Metal captures all of your happiest memories about tearing Paris to pieces with explosions and ice cream trucks. It isn't so much a sequel or redux of the original games as much as it is a replication of what we remember about them—they're an absolute blast.



▸ CLUB THE ACES
Alice clobbers cards and other notable Wonderland weirdos.

ALICE: MADNESS RETURNS

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Spicy Horse • Release Date: TBD 2011

American McGee's Alice went under the radar when it hit PCs in 2000, but it became a cult hit with the same crowd that loves Clive Barker's horror and Tim Burton's absurdity. Its ultra-violent interpretation of C.S. Lewis' Wonderland was a bizarre and frightening twist that's getting a second shot at life, and Madness Returns looks like its hitting many of its predecessor's high notes. We're big fans of its demented enemy design and macabre settings, though we're really anxious to check out what the combat's like. We're pumped because we don't fully know what to expect from the story, either; American McGee has some wild ideas concerning classic tales, that we're stoked to see fleshed out. And hey, what's not to like about slicing living playing cards into bits and pieces?

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

Publisher: WB/Eidos • Developer: Rocksteady • Release Date: Fall 2011

Ignoring Batman's involvement altogether, *Arkham Asylum* was one of the best action-adventure games of 2009. Its rock-solid pacing brewed the right mixture of slow yet engaging storytelling, exciting action sequences, and tense escapes. The fact that the game happened to take place in Bruce Wayne's backyard just improved everyone's opinion of it.

As for the upcoming *Arkham City*, the larger setting and new cast of famous villains, including Catwoman, Mr. Freeze, and Two Face, present a lot of interesting new possibilities. Gangs spark a civil war within Gotham that poses large problems for ol' Bats as he tries to reclaim the villain-controlled metropolis. We're most anxious to play with its new combat system—anti-weapon counters and new ways to use the environment to attack enemies sound like steps in the right direction. Its darker direction is intriguing as well; *Arkham City*'s supposed to outdo its already morose predecessor in the grim department. *Arkham City* is well on its way to satisfying comic book nerds' wildest fantasies in the same way *Asylum* nearly perfected—and we have a sneaking suspicion Rocksteady's working on some sort of multiplayer, too.

KILLZONE 3

Publisher: SCEA •
Developer: Guerilla Games •
Release Date: February 22, 2011

Killzone 2 had some issues. Some thought it a plain, repetitive shooter with great graphics and huge hype. *Killzone 3*'s solution? Jetpacks. Adding the element of elevation to Killzone's battlefields is a welcome change from the last game's straightforward linearity. We're also big fans of the sequel's new environments—you'll leave the city for a snowy island facility, for instance. Anything to get away from the dull browns! The added focus on melee executions also lends a little variety to each encounter with the Helghast. Most of all, however, we're psyched to see how *Killzone 3* improves on its predecessor's excellent online multiplayer.

DIABLO 3

Publisher: Activision Blizzard • Developer: Blizzard • Release Date: TBD

Diablo 3 looks like an attempt to improve the franchise's proven formula rather than evolve it—and the loot-gobbling gold addict inside us deems this an acceptable design direction. *Diablo 3* is more concerned with cool new classes, like the Witch Doctor and Demon Hunter, than with radically readjusting what's traditionally worked so well for it.

DEUS EX

Publisher: Square Enix •
Developer: Eidos Montréal •
Release Date: March 8, 2011

We can't wait to get our fleshy human hands on this sweet robo-enhancement hook-up, better known as *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. This first-person role-playing game has plenty of unlockable upgrades that will change the way you play, and we're equally excited to blow enemies away and to play as a smooth-talkin' pacifist. Coercion and conversation can be as crucial as killin'—and that's fine by us.

▼ PRACTICAL?
Chain-gun arm? Yeah, that'll be our first upgrade, thank you very much.

RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON

Publisher: THQ • Developer: Volition • Release Date: May 2011

We worried about Armageddon's shift from a fully destructible world to Mars' claustrophobic underground. Fortunately, despite the walls and ceilings, this sequel to the popular Guerrilla isn't leaving its predecessor's most valuable asset behind—it's actually refocusing it. You'll spend less time chipping away at walls with a sledgehammer and more time with interesting future weapons.

▸ DESTROY!
Mechanized suits (exactly like this one) help you conquer the new underground.

▸ ALL OUT OF GUM
We take men as serious as their belt buckles. In Duke's case, we take him very, very seriously.

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Publisher: 2K Games • Developer: Gearbox • Release Date: TBD

Duke Nukem Forever is actually coming out! This feels like nothing short of a miracle. *Duke* fans will adore *Forever*: It's the shooter it should have been. It looks pretty on fancy-pants modern tech, but its gameplay and design definitely hearken back to 1999. Duke's one-liners are perfectly cliché, and *Forever*'s crude humor will make you grin when you're not rolling your eyes. 12 years in the making, DNF looks like a fun, goofy game.

NINTENDO 3DS

Release Date: March 2011

It's startling how regularly Nintendo cranks out upgrades we're willing to purchase. Each new DS has been an improvement over its predecessor, and the 3DS may be the most substantial, impressive improvement yet. It's the size of a DS Lite but has a bigger screen and guts so impressive it can display 3D graphics without glasses. With *Metal Gear Solid*, *Assassin's Creed* and *Resident Evil* titles headlining this hardware redux, it's gonna be tough not to tap out our wallets.

MASS EFFECT 3

Publisher: Electronic Arts •
Developer: BioWare •
Release Date: Holiday 2011

The trailer that launched at last year's Spike Video Game Awards showed Earth under attack by yet another vicious alien threat, and it would appear that Shepard has his or her biggest challenge to date. While you can already fiddle with the *Mass Effect 3* engine in the PlayStation 3 version of *Mass Effect 2*, we'll all have to wait until later this year to find out what the newest alien threat actually is.

PORTAL 2

Publisher: Valve • Developer: Valve • Release Date: April 18, 2011

The original *Portal* was a cohesive, closed narrative that didn't need a sequel, but boy are we glad that it's getting one. Following the same mind-bending premise as its predecessor—navigating complex environments with portable doors you can place almost anywhere—*Portal 2*'s puzzles look like they're going to hurt some heads. This time you've got several new tools. For example, one spreadable gel lets you slide speedily along, while another acts as a makeshift trampoline. With any luck these new additions will carry over into *Portal 2*'s cooperative campaign, which puts you and a pal into a series of even tougher situations. Coordinating with your friend might require some anger management, though—"No, no, you've got to do that quicker! Why can't you listen!?" Oh, and two players with two portals each? We already have headaches wondering how momentum plays into that. With each campaign clocking in at double the length of the first game, it's a safe bet that *Portal 2* will be worth its retail price.

STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM

Publisher: Activision Blizzard • Developer: Blizzard • Release Date: TBD

How *Heart of the Swarm* will affect *StarCraft II*'s multiplayer remains to be seen, but the premise—continuing the story from a Zerg-infected Sarah Kerrigan's side and wiping out the good guys—is enough to sell us on its single-player. The outstanding single-player missions stand out as one of *StarCraft II*'s strongest aspects, and there's no reason to doubt that Blizzard's going to keep that originality flowing through another campaign. Expanding your empire is a nice new wrinkle, and should have a considerably different feel than *Wings of Liberty*'s fight-for-your-life solo game. That, and the whole seeming inevitability of the Protoss genocide makes our inner lore fanatic giddy.

DRAGON AGE 2

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: BioWare • Release Date: March 8, 2011

BioWare's aim for *Dragon Age 2* wasn't just to fix the first game's problems, but to differentiate the console and PC versions. Everyone gets the same story, but console versions aren't just PC ports anymore: They're tailored toward the controller with an action-RPG orientation. Meanwhile, PC players get the same treatment as from the first *Dragon Age*. Everybody wins!

MORTAL KOMBAT

Publisher: WB • Developer: NetherRealm • Release Date: Spring 2011

If there's one thing *Mortal Kombat* excels at, it's its ability to take us back in time. Almost 20 years later, *Mortal Kombat* feels exactly the same as it used to, in all the right ways. The most important thing about this 3D-fighter-on-a-2D-plane is that it irons out the most significant flaws of last year's *MK vs. DC Universe*, and amps up the over-the-top style.

▶ WHEN I MOVE... Shigeru Miyamoto promises 1:1 movement tracking in *Zelda*'s combat. If you don't have Wii Motion Plus yet, now would be the time to remedy that.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo • Release Date: TBD

Since 1998's *Ocarina of Time* you can probably count *Zelda*'s changes—not improvements, mind you, but major mechanical adjustments—on one hand. Yet more than a decade later, it's still the series we immediately gravitate toward and welcome with open arms. *Skyward Sword* seems to have bigger plans than any recent console or portable *Zelda* title, and that strikes us just fine. The precise sword combat plays a role beyond just feeling cool—you'll have to hit specific enemies a certain way to take 'em down. Nintendo's also changing the way *Zelda*'s structured on a fundamental level. Alternating between a big world and contained, puzzle-filled dungeon is a thing of the past, with *Skyward Sword* seeking a stronger, more elegant means by which to unfold. Link's new abilities are also geared toward motion controls, so the game won't feel as much like a GameCube title with waggle, as *Twilight Princess* did. And we have to say, we're already fans of the bomb-dropping dragonfly-looking thing. *Skyward Sword* has a lot of new ideas, and hopefully that'll lead to the refreshingly new *Legend of Zelda* experience that the franchise deserves.

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

Publisher: SOE • Developer: SOE • Release Date: January 2011

City of Heroes never quite captured our desire for a superhero-centric MMO because it lacked the most important thing: superheroes we knew and loved. DC Universe Online's lineup of classic heroes and villains—Joker, Superman, etc.—remedies that very problem. You won't be able to play as these heroes, though: You'll create your very own super-secret identity and beat the crap out of other players alongside the legends. Perhaps best of all, it's all story-based, so there'll be some real incentive beyond beating up those nasty burglars for XP. Really, if there's anything that can tear the world away from its Cataclysmic addiction to WoW it'll be those blue tights.

CLOSE ENOUGH
You can't play as Supes, but you'll hang out with him and other Justice Leaguers. Maybe they'll even sign your spandex.

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: BioWare • Release Date: TBD

As much as *The Old Republic* touts itself as a massively multiplayer online RPG, it's actually most exciting as an online cooperative game. We're less excited about large-scale lightsaber duels with anonymous players—although that sounds fun, too—but thrilled to play a bunch of BioWare-crafted Star Wars stories alongside co-op friends. Ship-to-ship space combat gives it a chance to rise head and shoulders above other MMOs, but how that'll be executed remains to be seen. A universe filled with loot, starships, and space battles sounds stellar, but it's the prospect of having to make difficult, set-in-stone dialogue decisions that makes us tingle.

METAL GEAR: RISING

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Kojima Productions • Release Date: TBD

It's still not entirely clear if *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* is coming in 2011, but we're thinking if we hope hard enough it might make it by Christmas. Hideo Kojima's stepped back to a producer role and isn't directly involved in any design or directorial capacity, one of many reasons *Rising* is such a departure for the series. Raiden, the pretty-boy-turned-tough ninja, snubs Solid Snake's stealth tactics in favor of brazenly dismembering soldiers with a katana and ripping out robo-spines. As long as the story's as bonkers as ever, we're keeping open minds.

UNCHARTED 3

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Naughty Dog • Release Date: Nov. 1, 2011

We're eternally grateful to Naughty Dog that *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* doesn't have any ties to the upcoming film adaptation starring, uh, Mark Wahlberg. We want another pure, original Nathan Drake adventure starring sexy sidekicks, supernatural twists, and sweet, sweet treasure. Naughty Dog's done right by us twice already, but *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* set a ridiculously high bar. How can the team top that? The teaser showing a traumatized Drake after a catastrophic plane crash is a nice start.

▶ SHOES? HA!
As an homage to the third Indy flick, we're hoping to take down a plane using just an umbrella.

MOTORSTORM: APOCALYPSE

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Evolution • Release Date: Spring 2011

Split/Second's changing tracks are thrilling, but an exploding gas station can't contend with a crumbling city. *Motorstorm: Apocalypse* amplifies the intensity of racing by having you drive on top of fallen skyscrapers and escape Earth-cracking quakes while dodging other apocalyptic obstacles. We played the same track three times and found different routes to the finish each time. It's novel to plan your run down a line that didn't exist a minute ago.

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3: FATE OF TWO WORLDS

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Capcom • Release Date: February 15, 2011

Pretty colors, flashy visual effects and cartoony graphics? Yeah, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds* looks about as close to a 3D comic book as anyone could get. Like its popular predecessors, MvC3 is a ludicrously fast fighting game that trades meticulous balance and visual restraint for a gargantuan cast of cool characters and easy-to-execute special moves. We've got dibs on Hulk, Dante, and Chris Redfield.

▶ BIG FRESH FACE
Viewtiful Joe joins the primary cast of Capcom characters. Jill Valentine will join after launch as a downloadable cast member.

DEAD SPACE 2

Publisher: Visceral • Developer: Electronic Arts • Release Date: January 25, 2011

Horror games such as *Dead Space* aren't really synonymous with multiplayer, but online play sticks out as one of *Dead Space 2*'s most exciting additions. Defending and dismembering are the keys to surviving its intense cooperative multiplayer. It's not the waves of freaky-deaky monsters that frighten us—it's the overwhelming paranoia that our buddies won't be watching our backs. They'll have to, because a lone wolf is far more likely to become a cold corpse rather than a survivor. That goes for the necromorph team too (yes, you can play as the necromorphs!)—as Andy's mom always said, a coordinated team of reanimated corpses is a winning one.

▶ OBJECTS IN SPACE
Newly expanded zero-gravity sections will let Isaac attack (and dodge) from all angles.

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft • Release Date: TBD

Ghost Recon is well known for rigorously abiding by realism while tossing in the odd bit of plausibly real crazy techno-gadgetry. *Future Soldier* embraces the near-future science fiction side of the military while still retaining believability—you know, as real as you'd expect invisible infiltration to get. Ubisoft recently pushed the release date from March to later in the year, which the multiplayer beta delay sort of hinted at. That's a bummer, because I was hoping to fight some friends with whatever high-tech weapons the game concocts as soon as I possibly could. But if those extra months in the oven are what *Ghost Recon* needs to excel, I'm more than willing to wait.

HARDCORE Wii GAMING

The Wii has a fair few hardcore gems to offer amid the waggle wasteland • Words: Dennis Scimeca

So-called "hardcore" games challenge our reflexes and ability to think quickly. They often require concentration and demand to be taken seriously. They are not for the faint of heart or weak of skill, and excite us with their stories, graphics, sound design, and deep gameplay. They are also not what you'd expect to find on Nintendo's Wii.

The Wii has been sold as a "family friendly" system, and that's worked out well. Wii's the current home of Nintendo's stable of cute, lovable characters, and its motion controls appeal to folks who might be intimidated by traditional controllers. As such, many hardcore gamers pass up the Wii, thinking that the system has little to offer.

Surprisingly, the Wii actually enjoys a nice little collection of hardcore-leaning games, which have slowly accumulated since the system's 2005 launch. If you've been wondering whether the Wii is worth buying, or if you've already made the plunge and are suffering the scorn of your more judgmental friends, here are eight games you might want to consider adding to your library. Who knows? If you look like you're having fun your friends might even want to join in. (Don't forget to scoff.)

▼ Characters splattering into thick clouds of viscera? Yep, definitely a *Dead Space*.

▼ Space scurvy: It's a hell of a thing. (Be sure to eat your space oranges.)

DEAD SPACE EXTRACTION

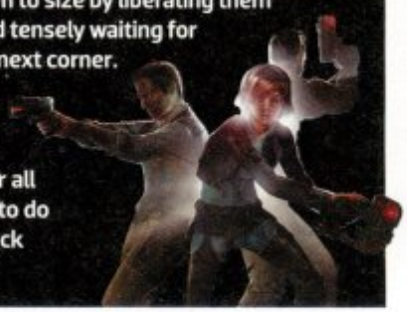
MATURE 17+ M ESRB

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Visceral Games

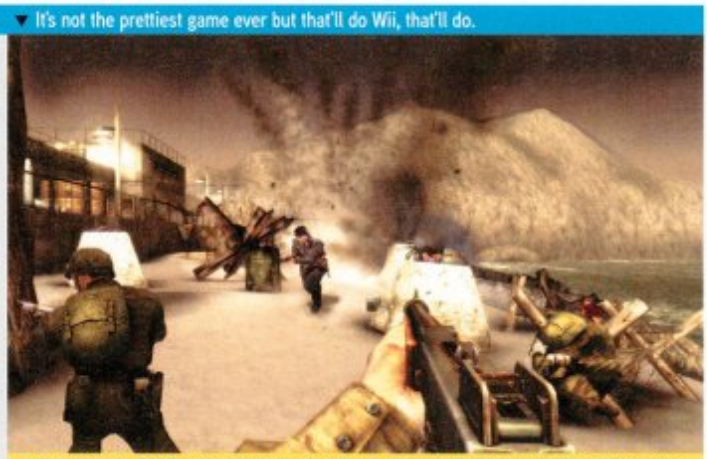
You may want to consider making this your flagship Wii game. While it is very different from the original *Dead Space*, it's still very clearly a *Dead Space* game, replete with all the tension and gore you'd expect.

Essential a prequel, in *Dead Space Extraction* you'll begin as part of the USG Ishimura's mining team unearthing the alien Marker from the depths of Aegis VII, but play through the majority of the game as a survivor trying to escape the hell that the Marker has unleashed on the colony.

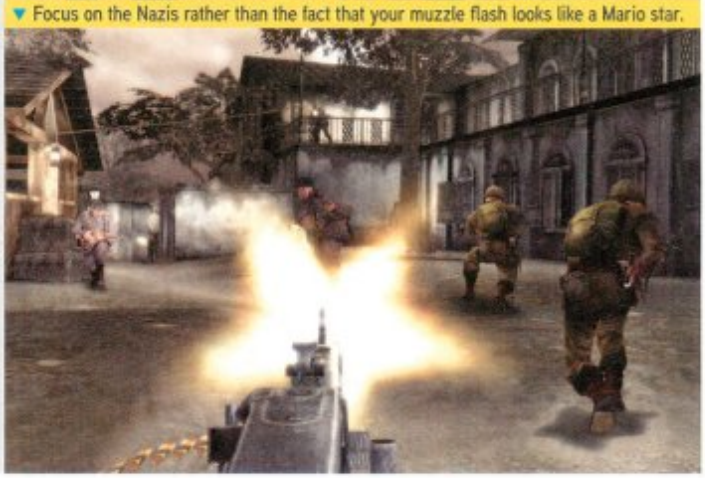
More an action title as opposed to a survival horror game, the shooting mechanics form the core of the gameplay. You'll still be chopping Necromorphs down to size by liberating them from their limbs and heads, and tensely waiting for whatever might be around the next corner. *Extraction* is an on-rails shooter, but the incorporation of the Stasis and Telekinesis powers, and dual fire modes for all your weapons, give you plenty to do with your Wii Remote + Nunchuck combo, or Zapper.



▼ It's not the prettiest game ever but that'll do Wii, that'll do.



▼ Focus on the Nazis rather than the fact that your muzzle flash looks like a Mario star.



MEDAL OF HONOR HEROES 2

EVERYONE 10+ E ESRB

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: EA Canada

Heroes 2 is an homage to the earliest *Medal of Honor* games. You play an Office of Strategic Services agent dropped behind enemy lines to dismantle various Nazi schemes. This time when you reload your weapon, however, you'll shake the spent clip out of your gun, and when you toss a grenade at the Germans, you'll feel it.

This is by no means a watered-down Xbox refugee, and *Heroes 2* can be downright challenging. You're going to have to play smartly and use cover wisely, which is good training for the competitive online multiplayer, which supports up to 32 players.

Medal of Honor Heroes 2 may also convince you to purchase the Zapper peripheral. When you're holding a Thompson submachine gun or a German MP40 machine pistol in the game, and realize that you're also holding a pair of pistol grips on your controller, I defy you not to let an impish grin spread over your face. There's even a special "Arcade" mode that lets you turn the game into a laid-back on-rails experience, making the Zapper option even more attractive.

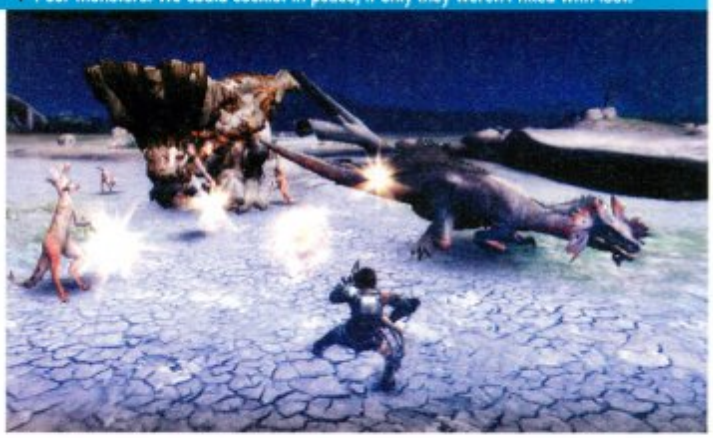
▼ Pictionary with Jaws: "Ok, so five...nukes? Aha, five nuclear copters!"

GOLDENEYE 007

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Eurocom

It's not the classic Nintendo 64 version, but this Bond game is a must for any fan of the movies, or anyone who wants a shooter that's hardcore enough to warrant stepping up to dual-analog controls. The classic game has been reworked with Daniel Craig stepping in as Bond, and a fresh story written by Hollywood talent. The espionage and stealth sequences in the campaign are fitting for any game with a "00" label, and the multiplayer is amazingly deep. Hand someone a Classic Controller Pro, throw *Goldeneye* into the Wii, and any hardcore shooter fan should be right at home.

▼ Poor monsters. We could coexist in peace, if only they weren't filled with loot.



MONSTER HUNTER TRI

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Capcom

The *Monster Hunter* series has an established hardcore pedigree, and *Tri* does not disappoint in this vein. Of all the games on this list, *Monster Hunter Tri* may be the "hardest" in terms of sheer depth and challenging gameplay. It's an action-RPG with combat that requires careful thought and tactics, a wide variety of different kinds of loot and gear, and all the item crafting and inventory management you'd expect from a role-playing game. While you can play offline, massively multiplayer online game fans will feel right at home in *Monster Hunter Tri*'s online, cooperative gameplay.

▼ It dismembers pretty nicely for an eBay lightsaber replica.

NO MORE HEROES

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture

You won't want to play this fun, stylish game when there are kids in the room. You take on the role of real-life nerd / wannabe assassin Travis Touchdown, who has to take out other high-profile assassins to earn some professional respect. *No More Heroes* mixes open-world, *Grand Theft Auto*-style city exploration complete with mini-games and side missions with "ranked fight" levels that involve massacring hordes of bodyguards and culminate in vicious boss duels. Fighting through crowds of goons with the Wii Remote and Nunchuck can be quite a workout, but the rush of cleaving a boss's head from their shoulders is worth it.

▼ Rave mode? No, just more videogame weapon trails. Thanks *Soulcalibur*!

NO MORE HEROES 2

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture

After the first game became a hit with hardcore Wii gamers this follow-up tightened the formula. If you're more of an action gamer than an open-world fan you may want to skip straight to this sequel. It makes exploration more optional, so you can get right to the frenetic combat. There's a ton of added depth for everyone else, however, including a bunch of new mini-games, clothing, and weapons options. The amount of work developer Suda 51 put into creating this follow-up illustrates just how seriously he took the Wii as a hardcore console.

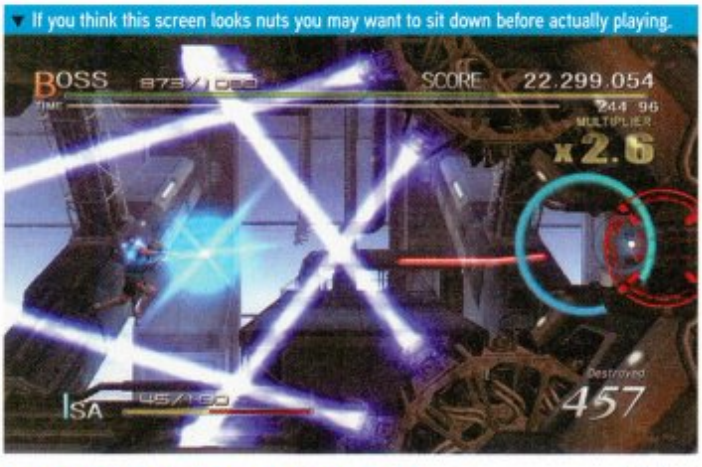
▼ Don't bring a sword to a gun fi...wait, how'd that go again?

RED STEEL 2

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Paris

The original *Red Steel* can almost be considered an experiment in getting the sword-swinging motion control formula correct for the Wii. This follow-up title nails it. Part Wild West shootout, part samurai story, *Red Steel 2* mixes first-person shooter presentation and fighting game mechanics. The Wii Remote's potential really shines here, as the variety of available sword strikes is tied to precise arm and wrist motions. The end result really feels like you're swinging that katana, leading to some very satisfying combat. Upgradeable moves and Challenge Mode provide a lot of replay value.

▼ If you think this screen looks nuts you may want to sit down before actually playing.



SIN AND PUNISHMENT: STAR SUCCESSOR

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Treasure

If there's a title on this list to make a hardcore gamer question his or her skills and break down weeping, Star Successor would be it. It's essentially a third-person, on-rails shooter. You don't actually move through levels, but rather keep your character safe from damage while shooting enemies until each level ends in an amazing boss fight. While it sounds simple, dodging and dashing to avoid damage while locking onto enemies and charging your shots is not easy. You can't blame the controller either, as the game supports four different controller setups. Skills: Do you have them?

Wii want more!

CLASSIC CONTROLLER PRO

The Classic Controller Pro is lightweight, comfortable, and precise. It draws power from the Wii Remote, which means it's effectively wireless and requires no additional batteries. It also comes in handy if you plan to enjoy any of the retro Nintendo games or WiiWare titles you can purchase online.

ZAPPER

The Wii Zapper takes a Wii Remote and Nunchuck and turns them into a successor to the old-fashioned light gun. In addition to providing a whole new way to experience Wii shooters, the Zapper comes bundled with the game Link's Crossbow Training, which makes the total package an absolute steal.

TAME THE GAME

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TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

Lizzie Cuevas

Lizzie wears many hats: Mostly, she crafts video and words for GamesRadar, she's an editor at FarmvillePost.com, and is an avid guitarist. Most anticipated 2011 game: *Portal 2*

Mitch Dyer

Mitch is such a prolific *@GAMER* contributor, we should just hire him—but he'd have a "CaCa" commute...that is, Canada-to-California. Most anticipated 2011 game: *X-Men Destiny*

Jillian Pierce

Though she's a talented page designer, Jillian is also a veteran gamer, which is why this issue brings her second *@GAMER* review. Most anticipated 2011 game: *Legend of Zelda*

Timothy J. Seppala

Tim has been talking for months about *Dead Space 2*, so much so we wouldn't let him choose it as his most-wanted... Most anticipated 2011 game: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*

TOP PICKS

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87 Michael Jackson: The Experience
88 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—Part I
88 Bejeweled 3
88 Apache: Air Assault
88 Splatterhouse

NOT PICKS

These games did not make the *@GAMER* cut:

- *CSI: Fatal Conspiracy*
- *Dragon Ball Z: Tenkaichi Tag Team*
- *Naruto Shippuden: Dragon Blade Chronicles*
- *Naruto Shippuden: Naruto vs. Sasuke*

▲ The addition of multiplayer is the single biggest difference in *Dead Space 2*, so thank goodness it does more than hold its own.

DEAD SPACE 2

In your living room, everyone can hear you scream • Words: Tom Price

If you have a heart or bladder condition, then you might be better off not playing *Dead Space 2*. But if you can handle having the bejeebus scared out of you, then by all means strap in. Following the skin-crawling events of the first game, *Dead Space 2* takes you on a similarly hair-raising ride through Necromorph-infested space to find the truth about the mysterious "Marker" and why everyone wants to control it.

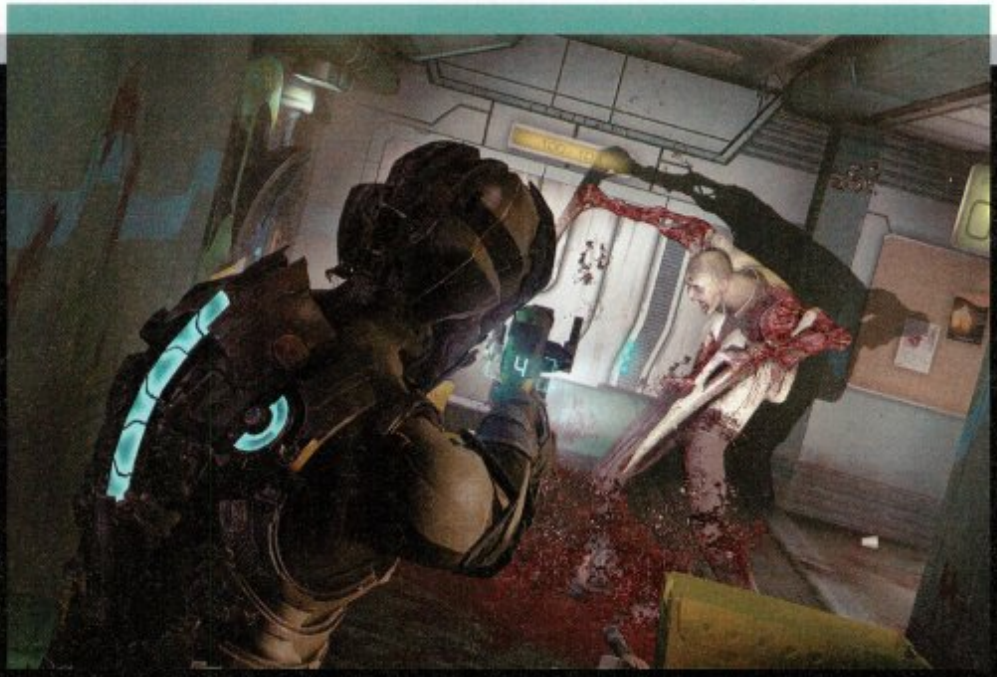
Once again you are deep-space mining engineer Isaac Clarke, though this time you're waking up in a hospital in the bowels of a densely populated mining station called "The Sprawl" on Saturn's largest moon, Titan. You've been rescued after the closing events of the first game (which you can handily review by watching the video "Previously on Dead Space," found in the main menu) but you've been out for a while while the doctors tried to figure out what they could extract from your brain. Things fall apart quickly and you find yourself escaping wearing nothing but your jammies and a straitjacket. It's as good an excuse as any for why you're completely unarmed in the early going, and also a nice riff on that classic *Metroid* cliché.

Soon enough you find yourself in familiar territory, with your cool suit of armor and your upgradeable weapons made from modified mining equipment. There are some new ones to play with, along with some new Necromorph types to play with them on, but for the most part the gameplay remains largely the same. If there's one big knock against *Dead Space 2* it's that it feels like a slightly refined yet otherwise unsurprising continuation of the first game. That's not a bad thing at all, provided you liked the original *Dead Space*. *Dead Space 2* is more of the same, but more of the same of something great.

WIL SAYS:

If there was one word that adequately described Dead Space 2, it would be "creepy."

DEAD SPACE 2 IS MORE OF THE SAME, BUT MORE OF THE SAME OF SOMETHING GREAT.



EVOLVING THE SERIES: MULTIPLAYER

Standard multiplayer modes found in other shooters clearly wouldn't be appropriate for *Dead Space*—you never fight anything but Necromorphs in single-player. So what do you get to do in *Dead Space 2*'s online modes? Play as a Necromorph! Four players form a Sprawl Security team and the other four play as one of four different Necromorph types. It takes some interesting strategies for sure—especially for the humans, who are limited to one weapon each—but getting to wield your own monstrous puke as a weapon makes it all worth it.

SLICE, DICE

One of the central components of *Dead Space* gameplay is using "strategic dismemberment" to take down Necromorphs. Each has different weak points, and using your weapons and time-slowing stasis abilities in tandem to exploit these is key to getting past even the gnarliest brutes. Take the guy above. You can cut that big glowing goiter off him, then grab it with your telekinetic powers and throw it back. It will explode on contact, taking out him and any of his nearby monster buddies. Other baddies have their own weak points and peculiarities, so pack a barf bag and, uh, be creative!

▲ Infected little kids who hunt in packs? Better take them back to daycare! (Yes, that is a euphemism.)

▲ This is your trusty plasma cutter. If someone has too many limbs, you can use this to help them out.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DEAD SPACE 2

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: Visceral Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Eight players online

GENRE
Survival horror

RELEASE DATE
January 25, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Sci-fi and horror fans, equally

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Excellent sound design produces the perfect eerie atmosphere
- ❤ Imaginative level design; great detail to the environment
- ❤ Clever multiplayer design makes for some unique online experiences

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ It can get hard in the later sections of the game, even on default difficulty

GAMER

- Alien autopsies
- So scary
- Spaced out

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5

LITTLEBIG PLANET 2

The Sack is back • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

There's definitely nothing little about LittleBigPlanet 2. The first game gave you near-endless opportunities to create mind-blowing, complex levels, and now the sequel expands those possibilities with a barrage of new features. Even if you haven't played the original, LittleBigPlanet 2 is easy to pick up and play for both players and creators. Ideally you're a bit of both.

That said, it's not all just creating levels. Whether or not you're intimidated or just disinterested in level creation, the Story Mode has a lot to offer on its own. The entire story revolves around Sackboy joining old friend Larry Da Vinci and the Alliance to keep the evil Negativitron from destroying Craftworld. While going through Story Mode you can unlock extra levels, including co-op and multiplayer levels where up to four people can play. There's also an ever-expanding amount of user-made levels in the Community section, to which you can add your own. (No pressure!)

Media Molecule's added a couple of cool new features that can also be used in the levels you create. The grappling hook, for instance, enables your sack-person to grab objects in high places and swing around the level. Another new feature is the bounce pad, which can be used to craft some very creative vertical levels. One really cool level in LittleBigPlanet 2 has a narrow pathway lined up with bounce pads on each side, so you can ricochet off each one very rapidly until you get to the end.

With all of the new features, you can not only create your own levels, but your own games and in various genres. You can create racing games, minigames, and even shooters with the game's Creatinator—a helmet your character can wear to shoot objects into the level.

LittleBigPlanet 2 definitely stands by its mantra of "Create. Play. Share." By combining those three elements, it's hard to ever run out of things to do.

SACK ATTACK

With all of the new features this sequel has to offer, nothing quite stands out like the Sackbots. Some of the levels in Story Mode implement these Sackbots—basically, robot versions of Sackboy—in gameplay. One level requires you to collect and guide an army of Sackbots to the end of the course. In creating levels, you can program and customize these Sackbots to follow, attack, or flee from you.

IN-GAME \\

BRINGING IT BACK

If you've played the first game you can import your *LittleBigPlanet* profile (sack-person and all) into *LittleBigPlanet 2*.

Clothes Horse
Score new duds by playing through Story Mode and collecting new costumes.
Sackbots
You can even use Sackboy's costumes to dress up your Sackbots.

Even though *LittleBigPlanet 2* is considered a platformer, you can create many kinds of games, including racing games and even shooters.

PS3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

INFO
Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Media Molecule
Platforms: PS3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to four players competitive or cooperative, local or online

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
January 18, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of the first game, people who like platformers and puzzles, and creative geniuses

ALL ABOUT .ME

Sharing your own levels in *LittleBigPlanet 2* just got a ton easier with the addition of LBP.me. Every time you create a level to share it generates a page on the website LBP.me, meaning you can even view them without a PS3. The page shows players who recently played the level, as well as screenshots and ratings. On the main site you can view the top-rated levels. Nice!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Addictive gameplay
- ❤ Charming soundtrack
- ❤ Never run out of things to do in the game

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Creating a good level takes a lot of time and patience

SEE A SACKBOY MOVE

Though I wasn't able to test it out, LittleBigPlanet 2 is compatible with PlayStation Move. You can use the Move Controller to move and manipulate objects while playing through certain levels, as well as use them to drag and draw new objects when creating levels.

AGamer

- Addictively fun
- Limitless content
- Creator's canvas

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

GRAN TURISMO 5

A long incubation leads to unmet expectations • Steve Klett

Gran Turismo fans have been waiting for what feels like an eternity for the next big thing. Unfortunately, *Gran Turismo 5* pulls off the dubious feat of feeling not quite fully tuned after more than five years in the development garage.

That said, if realism is your primary want in a racing game, *Gran Turismo 5* is PS3's holy grail. Spend a little time with a *Need for Speed* game and then get behind the wheel of any of *Gran Turismo 5*'s 1,000 cars (that number is far less impressive than it sounds, unfortunately) and the simulation qualities will truly shine. The physics just feel more "real" than in any other game I've played on PS3—you feel every bump in the road, cornering/drifting is an art form that you need to master with each new car you put in your garage, and learning to draft the competition can spell the difference between victory and defeat (which the new NASCAR events will prove in short order). Basically, proper driving technique matters.

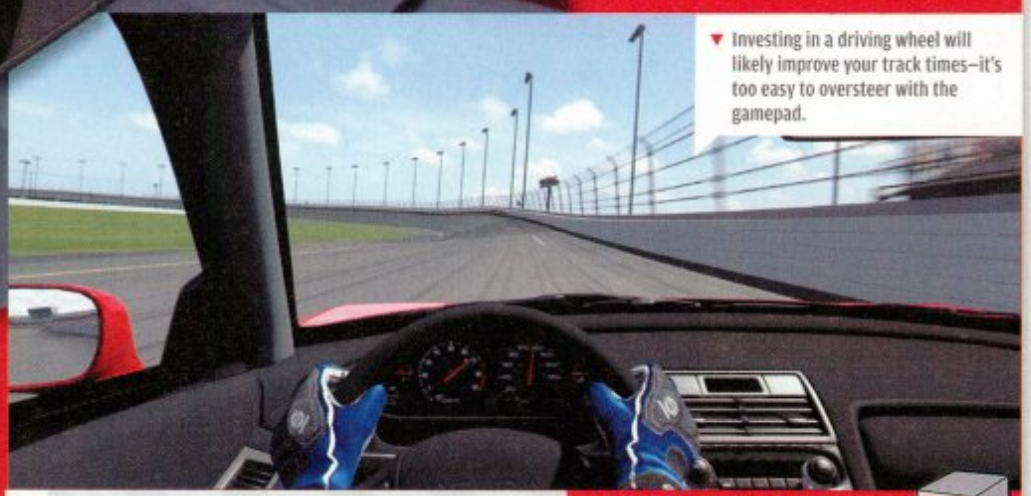
However—and unfortunately—it's also possible to take the New York Yankee approach and buy yourself the gold trophy by simply upgrading your car; the AI doesn't really attempt to match your specs. There always seems to be an upgrade to exploit.

Plus, the interface is needlessly complicated to navigate, and it's far too cumbersome to find cars that meet each race's restrictions. Add glaring visual inconsistencies—some tracks look vastly better than others, as do some of the cars (see "Beauty and the Beasts")—some truly atrocious music, and frustrating driver AI in B-Spec mode (see "Do You Like to Watch?"), and you've got what feels like an unpolished game.

Fortunately, *GT5*'s extremely high realism factor will make up for most of these flaws among those who prefer a more hardcore racing experience.

DO YOU LIKE TO WATCH?

Gran Turismo 5 includes an interesting mode called B-Spec, which basically lets you play the role of a racing team owner. You create a driver and attempt to direct him to victory using a set of basic commands. It sounds cool on paper, but in practice the dodgy driver AI proves more frustrating than fun.



▼ Investing in a driving wheel will likely improve your track times—it's too easy to oversteer with the gamepad.

BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS \\

Gran Turismo 5 boasts a staggering 1,000 cars. However, 80 percent of these are "standard" cars, carried over from earlier GT games...and they look it, particularly compared to the newly rendered and stunning premium cars. (Plus, many of the 1,000 cars are useless in the actual game.) However, the developer has promised frequent free updates to the game, which may include upgrading the standard cars to premium status over time. Stay tuned.

ANDY SAYS:

GT5 is definitely a gorgeous game to play. That is, if you can get past its complexities. If your racing leanings are more on the *Need for Speed* side of things, you may find GT5 frustrating.

PS3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

GRAN TURISMO 5

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Polyphony Digital
Platforms: PS3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
1–4 local players (splitscreen) and 16 online

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
November 24, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Racing fans with a hunger for realism and tweaking their rides

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Generous stable of interesting cars to drive
- ❤ Eye-popping premium cars
- ❤ Plenty of depth and extraordinary replay value

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Needlessly complicated interface
- ✖ Too easy to buy a win
- ✖ Inconsistent visual quality throughout

@GAMER

- Round and round...
- Left turns only?
- Car-alicious

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

Disney EPIC MICKEY

Seers and spatters and blotlings, oh my! • Words: Jillian Pierce

We all know the iconic Mickey Mouse from countless cartoons, Disney's theme parks, and previous videogames. He's always a hero, choosing right over wrong and oftentimes playing the beloved underdog. But you've never known Mickey Mouse like this before. This time, Warren Spector sheds a little light on a more imperfect and potentially mischievous hero in Disney Epic Mickey.

The game redefines Disney's iconic hero by making him face a not-so-heroic legacy. Junction Point Studios didn't just throw Mickey into a spooky world with hair-raising villains, where good will obviously defeat evil. Instead he finds himself in a Wasteland of his own accidental creation, crafted to house 80 years' worth of rejected characters. In Wasteland, good and bad aren't always discernible.

What puts this game above others are the choices you must make. They're an integral part of the storyline and shape your experience as a player. Equipped with paint and paint thinner there's no right or wrong way to use either in order to solve a problem, but there will be consequences to your actions. This kept me attentive and had me thinking before I got busy with the paintbrush. In some cases the old "thorn in the lion's foot" routine showed me that not everything is black and white...or green and blue.

While the choices are often interesting, the way they're presented sometimes slows the game down. Gus, a friendly gremlin, is there to walk you through major problems, and watching him go through the issues and your options to solve them becomes a little tiresome and makes Gus feel more like a hindrance.

On the upside, Epic Mickey's replay value is excellent. One of the bosses you'll encounter is the legendary Captain Hook from Disney's *Peter Pan*. He's a little more off his rocker then usual, and there are three different ways to beat him. It's fun to figure these out, and you have to stay sharp so as not to miss the little hints the game tosses you. You might discover a way to use thinner to solve a puzzle, maybe you'll use paint, or maybe you won't use either. The choice is yours and you're guaranteed to surprise yourself.

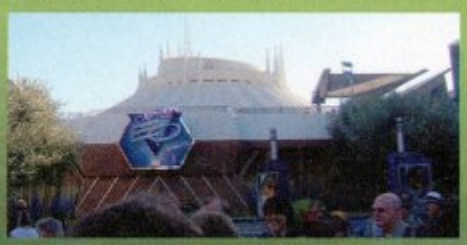
Epic Mickey tells a huge story, and clever and creative problems will keep you engaged and coming back for more. As in previous Warren Spector games, the question isn't if you'll save the day, but how you'll save it.

▼ Friends are a good thing to have when going up against enemies.

GUS
If you're a diehard Disney fan, this little fella should be a familiar face.

INSPIRATION

Warren Spector spent countless hours in the happiest place on Earth and watching cartoons over half a century old. Locations such as Space Mountain and cartoons like "Lonesome Ghosts" inspired much of the game's environments and storyline. This creative take on old-school Disneyana makes you feel invested in finding out more about Wasteland and the characters in it. You don't have to be a die-hard Mickey fan to uncover nuggets of inspiration.



▲ Many rides from the Disneyland theme park are well translated as game environments throughout *Epic Mickey*. Tomorrow City looked a lot like the real thing!

COLLECTABLES

Disneyland is full of rides, shows, and games. One aspect that inspired a collectible in *Epic Mickey* is Disney Pins. If it's been a while since you've been to Disneyland, you may not know about the pin craze that's been taking place. All over the park you can purchase pins from a collection of a few hundred and trade them with other park goers and cast members (employees).

MICKEY MOVES

While the game is expansive and complex, Mickey's abilities are not. Aside from brushing and blasting, he has a spin attack and a double jump. His abilities may seem meager, but they get the job done.

Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DISNEY EPIC MICKEY

INFO
Publisher: Disney Interactive
Developer: Junction Point Studios
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
November 30, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone with imagination and a sense of adventure (and a Wii)

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The untold story makes Mickey feel fresh and new
- ❤ The consequential effects make you stop and think
- ❤ The cinematic scenery and music make for a compelling adventure

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Run-throughs of problems slow the game down
- ✖ Transitions seem a little long

- Adventurous
- Dark
- Complex

OFFICIAL GAMER

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

▼ Mickey's long-lost brother has a world of his own.

UM, I KINDA LIKE MY HEART WHERE IT IS...

In Disney Epic Mickey, your only way out of Wasteland is what beats inside that little mouse's chest. But some people are out to take it from him. The Mad Doctor uses a plunger in attempt to dislodge it from Mickey's body at the beginning of the game. But that's not all the Mad Doctor has been up to. He's responsible for a lot of mechanical mischief, giving Wasteland a rickety, twisted feel.

ANDY SAYS:

Disney Epic Mickey hasn't been getting great reviews, and that's understandable. However, it's not a bad game! If you're a Disney fan looking for some solid adventuring fun, make sure to check this one out.

GAMEPLAY \\

TO PAINT OR NOT TO PAINT

Equipped with paint thinner and paint you can choose to erase or fill in environments, baddies, and missing links. The coolest part of the adventure is determining how you use your weapon.

▲ **ENVIRONMENTS** Seemingly translucent areas can be painted in and brightly colored areas can be erased. Each can unlock treasure, unmask hidden areas, and change the overall environment.

▲ **GUARDIAN** Depending on how you use paint and paint thinner, you will attract little sprites of a certain nature. Attract enough and you can use them to attack enemies and fight for you.

▲ **MINIONS** What's a game without its minions? You can choose to wipe them out or turn them into friends. The perk of friending is that they will turn on their own and fight for you.

▸ The graphics didn't get any polish whatsoever, and that's a good thing.

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

Collectors, pay attention, please. • Words: Taylor Cocke

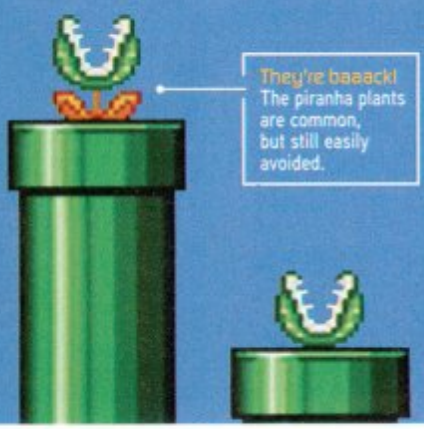
Just about everyone has played the NES Mario games. You've probably even played them dozens of times. So why should you care about yet another rerelease of a Mario collection? Because it's a fantastic celebration of everything great about the moustached plumber, that's why.

If you ever played *Super Mario All-Stars* for the Super Nintendo, you will be all too familiar with the games that come on this disc. In fact, it's a straight-up port of the 1993 release, right down to the menus and 16-bit music. It plays just like I remember it—fantastically—but that's to be expected. These are Miyamoto's masterpieces, after all. If you haven't yet picked them up from somewhere else, this is without a doubt the definitive collection.

And what if you already partake in the golden era of platformers somewhere else? Is it still worth it? In short, yes. The included art book beautifully recounts the history of the franchise with commentary from its most important contributors, and the soundtrack is filled with the classic tunes that helped make the series so iconic.

While *Super Mario All-Stars* doesn't necessarily bring anything new to the table, it's a worthy collector's piece that will please everyone from the newest fans to those who've been around for all 25 years.

IS IT STILL WORTH IT? IN SHORT, YES.



WIL SAYS:

I have mixed feelings: On one hand, it's mostly games many of us have already played to death. On the other hand, there's always an audience for "retro-ware," especially when classic titles are involved.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to two players locally

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
December 12, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of the Mario games of yesteryear

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Mario is still Mario
- ❤ The extras are really great for collectors
- ❤ It's awesome seeing what Miyamoto and crew think about their games

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Mario is nothing new
- ✖ Where are the rest of the 2D games?

@GAMER
- Classics
- Soundtrack
- Art book

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

GAME OF THE MONTH

Deathwing is finally free from his underground prison, and he's not happy.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM

Azeroth has been completely destroyed...and it's never looked better • Words: Andy Salisbury

It's clear that Blizzard is comfortable making MMO expansion packs. *Burning Crusade* was a strong effort, but it had its flaws. *Wrath of the Lich King* offered notable improvements, but still wasn't a life-changing experience. But *Cataclysm*? It has, without a doubt, made *World of Warcraft* the best game it's ever been. The expansion adds two new races in the Worgen (Alliance) and the Goblins (Horde) that feature unique experiences and personalities, a revamped talent system, and completely new zones (including a totally remodeled Azeroth) that genuinely make you feel like you're living the rich lore of Warcraft. Whether you're level 1 or 80, there's plenty of fun for everyone.

The leveling experience from 80 to 85 feels like a lot more than just five levels. Granted, you'll only "ding" a total of five times, but it'll take you from the depths of Deepholm to the highest peaks of Mount Hyjal. Making the experience even better are the new quests, which while familiar (they borrow heavily from the "kill X monsters" formula), also make you feel like you're out adventuring by enabling you to complete quests while you're in the field, then pick up the next quest in the chain.

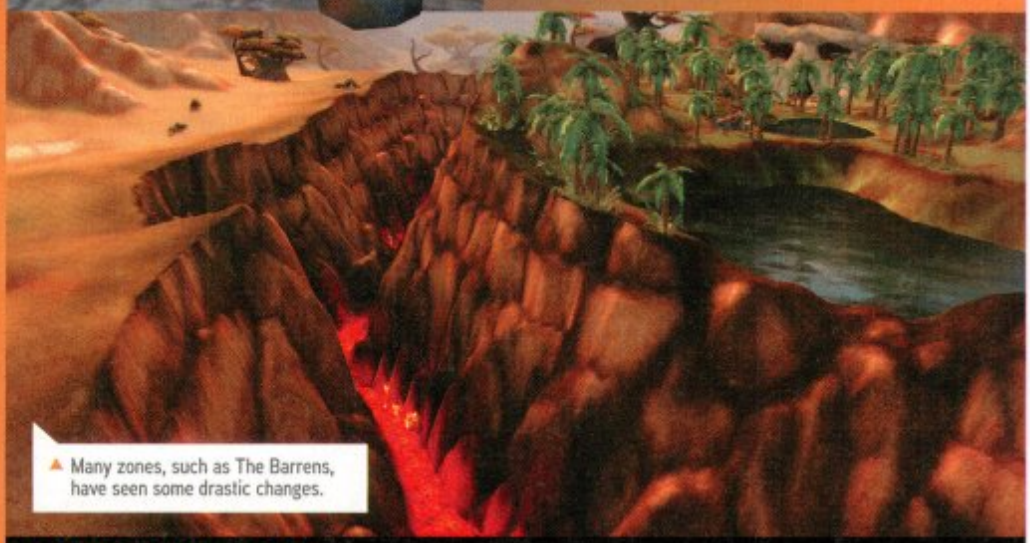
And as for the added races? Everyone at Blizzard should be extremely proud of the new Worgen and Goblin starting experiences. The Worgen experience is straight out of a Transylvanian countryside, complete with epic struggles, invading forces, lycanthropes (duh), and inner turmoil. However, the new expansion really shines with the Goblin starting area. The entire Goblin starting zone, from Kezan to the Lost Isles, is easily the most fun I've ever had playing *World of Warcraft* in my six years with the game. My countless nights spent in raids and hundreds (maybe thousands) of arena matches pale in comparison to the movie reference-filled joy ride that is the Goblin starting experience. It's too bad you need to be a little ugly green person to experience it.

While the game had its fair share of bugs at launch (in all fairness, they're not incredibly common and aren't game-breaking), it's legitimately the best experience you've ever had with *World of Warcraft*. If you're considering the game or just haven't played in a while, there's no better time to pick it up.

***CATACLYSM* IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE BEST EXPANSION TO DATE.**

LOOK MA, NEW CLASSES

While World of Warcraft's lore will only allow certain race/class combinations, the minds at Blizzard dreamed up some new storylines for the Warcraft universe, enabling brand-new race and class combinations. For example, the Druid class—which was previously reserved for the Night Elves and Tauren—can now be played by the Worgen and Trolls. And the Shaman class—which could previously only be played by the Draenei, Orcs, Trolls, and Tauren—can now be played by Dwarves on the Alliance side and Goblins in the Horde. Now, take this power and use it responsibly.



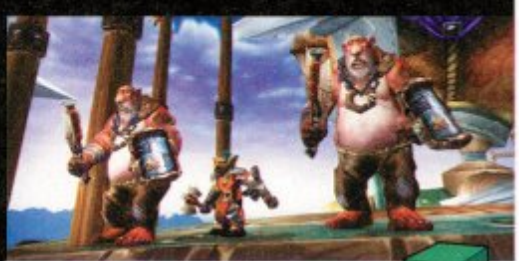
▲ Many zones, such as The Barrens, have seen some drastic changes.

A NEW LANDSCAPE

When Deathwing broke out of his prison in the elemental plane of Deepholm, he took out his anger on the landscape of Azeroth. As it turns out, that gave us a new world to play in. His misguided actions made have lead to almost countless changes (for example, The Barrens is now split into the North and South Barrens) and granted us the ability to fly in the old world. Now we don't have to reserve our hard-earned flying mounts for Outland and Northrend!

UNDA DA SEA

Among the new zones included with Cataclysm is Vashj'ir, which is completely underwater. Don't worry, though, you'll quickly gain the ability to breathe underwater—in this zone, at least—and get to ride a sweet seahorse (pictured). Just make sure to keep an eye out for the Whale Shark. He's much tougher than he looks.



WIL SAYS:

I don't care much for WoW (or MMOs, for that matter), but Cataclysm does look like one of Blizzard's best releases to date. That is, until it finally gets around to releasing *Diablo III*. That's still happening, right?

PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM

INFO
Publisher: Activision Blizzard
Developer: Blizzard
Platforms: PC, Mac
Reviewed on: PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
MMORPG

GENRE
MMORPG expansion

RELEASE DATE
December 7, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
WoW fans, old and new

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ New races offer a unique experience
- ❤ A completely reworked Azeroth makes what was old new again
- ❤ It's just plain easy to enjoy

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Glitches at launch make this great expansion pack fall just short of perfection

- Goblins
- Worgen
- Deathwing!

OVERALL RATING: 4.75/5

SONIC COLORS

Rolling down a rainbow road • Words: Heidi Kemps

It's been a long time coming, but after years of painful missteps Sonic is truly back in form. Sega went back to the drawing board and examined what players wanted from a next-gen title starring its most famous 16-bit mascot. The result is Sonic Colors, one of this year's best platformers.

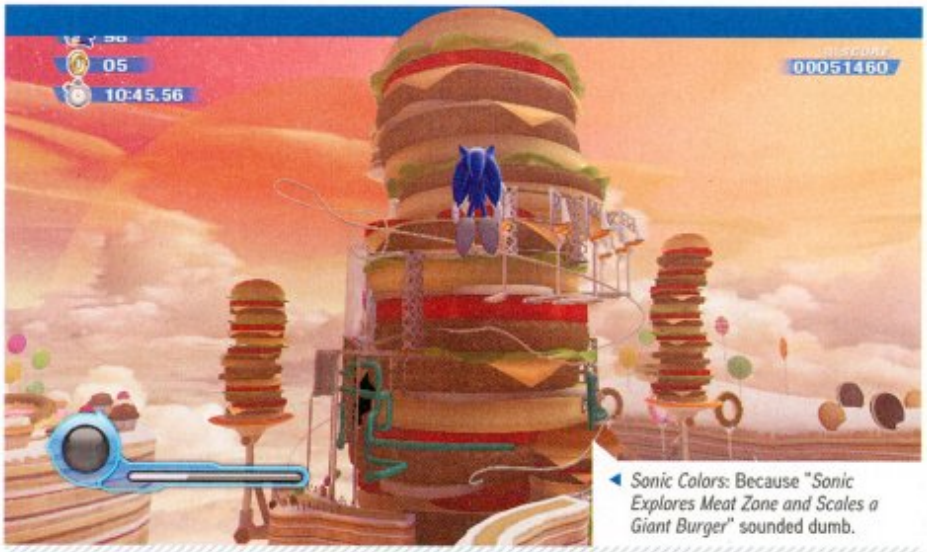
Eschewing the "serious" stories of the franchise's more notorious missteps, Sonic Colors sees Eggman constructing an amusement park in space. There's a sinister secret behind the festivities, however: Eggman is using aliens' energy to power the park! Rescue time. The cartoon-like presentation and humorous dialogue are well done, and ample humor helps maintain the lighthearted tone. The atmosphere is bolstered by fantastic graphic design, bursting with beautiful imagery and breathtaking set-pieces.

But presentation is nothing without gameplay to back it up. Sonic's most recent outings have been maligned for poor level design, unfair and frustrating challenges, and misguided gameplay additions. Sonic Colors, however, wisely scales things back. Its levels combine 3D and 2D side-scrolling sections, switching between the two seamlessly as you dash, jump, and fall through a (sometimes literal) roller-coaster of tricks and twists. The design of the 3D portions is fairly constricted, which isn't a bad thing—it keeps you focused. The game also alerts you to approaching traps when you're running at high speed, giving you more of an opportunity to dodge oncoming danger. Tough platforming sections in later levels do become quite challenging, and some sections still incite frustration. A little practice goes far.

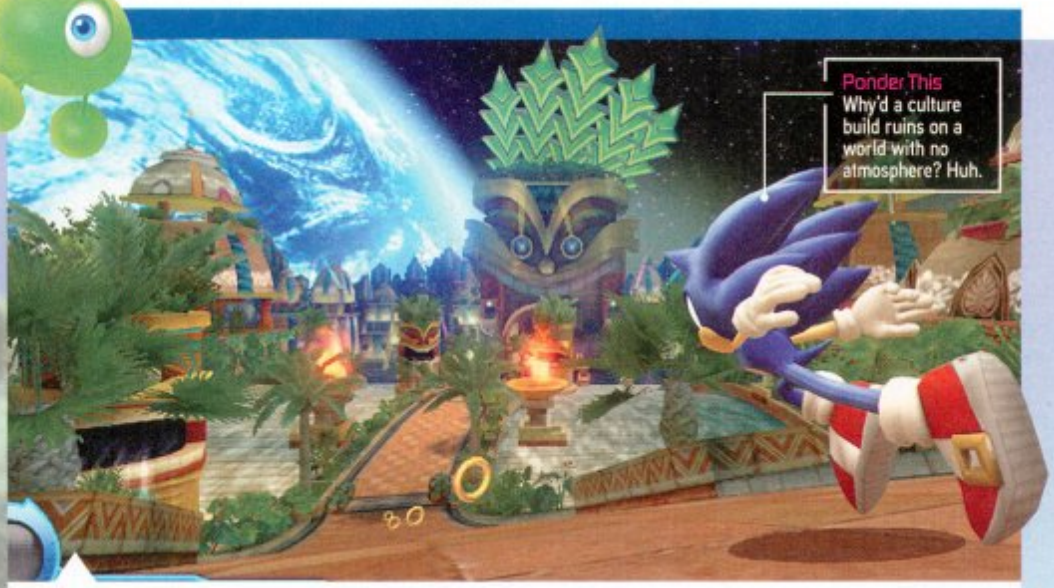
The unique gameplay element in Sonic Colors comes in "Wisps," alien beings that grant Sonic special abilities like speeding around as a laser and devouring obstacles. The Wisp abilities add interesting twists to levels, and using powers creatively helps find hidden secrets. Wisps also add replayablity—as you free more, they'll appear in levels you previously completed, enabling you to explore new areas.

Fans of platform games shouldn't miss Sonic Colors. It's charming, challenging, and fantastically fun, and will likely win over skeptics who have written off the series. If Colors is an indication of where the Sonic franchise is headed, then it has a very bright future.

SONIC COLORS IS ONE OF THIS YEAR'S BEST PLATFORMERS



◀ *Sonic Colors*: Because "*Sonic Explores Meat Zone and Scales a Giant Burger*" sounded dumb.



GOING SOLO

One of the major complaints levied against recent Sonic titles is a lack of focus on the titular hedgehog in his classic form. *Sonic Colors* eschews most of the series' supporting cast, featuring only Sonic's pal Tails in a supporting story role. The wisps simply help out in a very temporary capacity, so unlike *Sonic Unleashed*'s much-loathed Werehog, they don't completely change up the beloved hedgehog.

COLORS ON THE GO

DS RATING: 3.5/5

SONIC COLORS DS

Sonic Colors is also releasing on the Nintendo DS. This version uses the same setting, story, and themed areas, but differs in several respects, as it's more similar to the *Sonic Rush* games. Stages are all side-scrolling and fairly lengthy, the Wisps first appear in a different order, and the powers they grant are changed. Although there are only two levels per area (plus one boss), there are numerous short, timed "challenge missions" where you must perform set tasks. Finally, classic *Sonic* special stages are only in the DS version. It's a solid game overall, but lacks the spectacle and polish of its big brother.

▲ One wisp lets you drill through the ground, which greatly depresses local real estate values.

▲ Don't just stand around after you clear a stage. You can jump, dash, and smash up the numbers of your score tally, and sometimes the busted numbers will drop 1-ups. If you get a high stage rank you can earn even more extra lives!

WIL SAYS:

There have been a lot of lackluster Sonic titles as of late, but it's pretty clear that *Sonic Colors* is making a strong effort to renew the prestiege of the blue hedgehog. Now that I'm done, it's the market's turn to talk!

Wii DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

EVERYONE E

SONIC COLORS

INFO
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team (Wii), DIMPS (DS)
Platforms: Wii, DS
Reviewed on: Wii, DS

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
November 16, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Platforming fans and Sonic cultists waiting for His comeback

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Settings look fantastic, are fun to run through, and challenging without being unfair
- ❤ Levels are made to be replayed and mastered—and you'll want to replay them
- ❤ The game's jokes—especially Eggman's PA messages—are surprisingly well done

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Most boss battles are a total pushover

- Precarious platforming
- Monumental momentum
- Cacophony of color

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS

When will he learn to lock up his bananas? Honestly! • Words: Andy Salisbury

Nostalgia is king for virtually every long-time gamer on the face of the planet. It doesn't matter how great games are today, a part of us will always think back to days past and consider how fun it would be to relive our childhoods. Thankfully for the world's droves of hardcore Donkey Kong Country fans, Donkey Kong Country Returns has finally arrived, with all the imbalanced rhino levels you've learned to love and all the mine cart levels you loved to hate (or was that just me?).

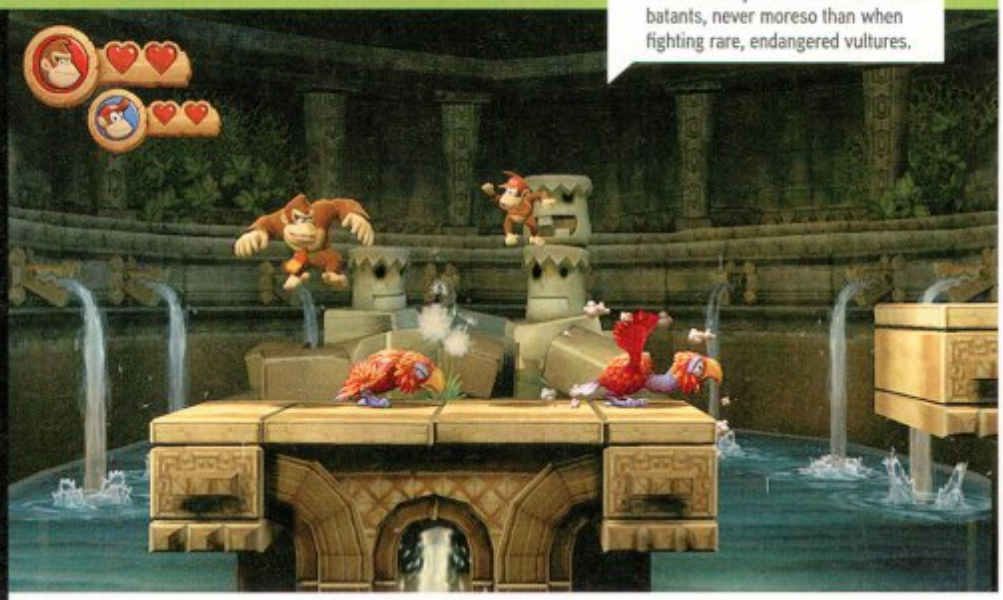
Donkey Kong Country Returns is the purest spiritual successor possible to Donkey Kong Country. True to the series (which was many things, but never terribly imaginative) you'll be dropped into a familiar-looking world in which Donkey Kong's bananas have been stolen once again. But note, not everything is exactly the same this time out. Diddy Kong is no longer an independent character, but rather a sidekick that rides on Donkey Kong's back, providing additional health and a hover ability. Also, your primate pals are a little hardier now, so they can take two hits each, instead of just one. Sound easier so far? Not so fast.

Unfortunately, you'll be in dire need of that extra bit of health. Donkey Kong Country Returns' controls are relatively intuitive, but since Nintendo insists on forcing you to waggle your controller one way or another, it's extremely easy to break up your "groove." Abilities such as pounding the ground (which will stun enemies and break blocks) and rolling (which is easily the most effective way to kill enemies) are both associated with shaking your controller. I'm not sure that's a change for the better.

Level design was something that stood out about Donkey Kong Country, and Donkey Kong Country Returns honors that proud tradition. Combining two equal parts of fun and frustration, the dreaded mine cart levels are back with a vengeance, but this all fits into the game's master scheme, which is never letting you feel comfortable with your abilities. I mean that in the best possible way. You'll never feel like you're playing the same level twice, or get bored when performing the same actions over and over. The levels are inspired, and marry plenty of new gameplay mechanics into this classic old style of gameplay. Much like the recent Mega Man games, Donkey Kong Country Returns knows that there's gameplay gold in them thar hills, and it doesn't hesitate to mine it.

PREPARE FOR ALL THE MINE CART LEVELS YOU LOVED TO HATE

Donkey Kong Country Returns truly follows in the heavy, hairy footprints of its predecessor. For better or for worse the formula of unforgiving fun hasn't changed. Ultimately it doesn't matter if you're an old-school fan of the SNES Donkey Kong Country series or if this is your first encounter: This is one Wii game that's worth your time...and frustration.



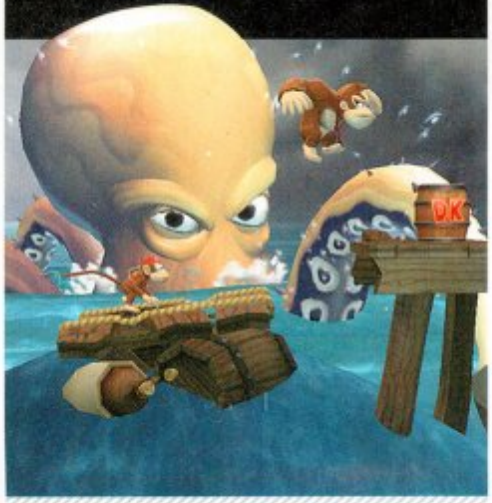
▼ DK and Diddy make formidable combatants, never moreso than when fighting rare, endangered vultures.

TEACHING AN OLD GORILLA NEW TRICKS

If you thought you'd be limited to mine cart and side-scrolling levels, you're wrong! Retro Studios brings several new level concepts to the game, including one which forces you to race from safe spot to safe spot while massive waves crash down. The rocket-based courses may be the single most fun addition: Pressing a button will cause you to accelerate, and letting go will slow you back down. Make sure to stay in the middle!

INTRODUCING: THE THIRD DIMENSION?

Perspective is tricky. If it's used improperly you'll feel as if you're simply looking at an object or character that's too big or too small, rather than being closer or further from where you're viewing. However, *Donkey Kong Country Returns* exploits this phenomenon to its fullest, painting a world that's convincingly three-dimensional. Many levels will barrel-launch you into areas behind the main course that are filled with bonus items and the K, O, N, G letters. It's not a big addition to the game, but more a subtle thing that looks fantastic.



▲ Just another day in the life, fleeing from a giant bat-thing by riding a makeshift rocket through an underground labyrinth.

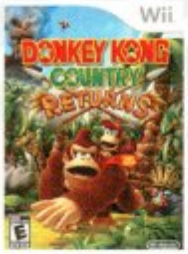
▲ Diddy plays a smaller role this time out, spending much of the game riding DK's back. Little dude's lazy.

WIL SAYS:

The original *Donkey Kong Country* didn't really catch my attention for one reason or another, but this new version looks solid! And maybe it's a game that'll drive some holdouts to buy a Wii.

Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
1-2 players local

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
November 21, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Side-scrolling platformer junkies, young and old

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Gameplay is true to the originals
- ❤ Smartly updated here and there to take advantage of Wii's capabilities
- ❤ Brilliant use of perspective

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Unforgivingly difficult at times
- ✖ Those darn mine cart levels

@GAMER
- Bananas
- Barrels
- Buddies!

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Jellyvision Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, DS
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Four players online or local

GENRE
Trivia

RELEASE DATE
January 25, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Adults, trivia buffs, and pop-culture nerds

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Uproarious questions and voiceover work
- ❤ So. Many. Episodes.
- ❤ Stupendous adult party game

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Playing solo

- Guffaw
- Think fast!
- Jack?

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

@GAMER

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Well, what *do* you know? • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Lately, party games have been nothing but cutesy mini-game collections. Those are fine for kids, but...uh, what about everyone else? *You Don't Know Jack* has the crass wit of the PC classic, but updated for the flat-panel TV era.

For the uninitiated, *YDKJ* is a trivia gameshow where you earn "money" for answering questions about pop culture. Up to four local or online players have 20 seconds to answer each question simultaneously, using their controllers to buzz in. Get it right and you snag some cash. Get it wrong and you'll lose money—and be ridiculed by the snarky host. Prize money doesn't matter and scores often dip deep into the red, but a quick-witted player can pull out of the hole in the final round of each game.

I played the game with my 50-something parents—my dad is a gamer; my mom not so much...and neither is up on their pop culture—and we had a blast. Mom doesn't know Snooki from Snoop Dogg, but it didn't stop her from correctly answering a question asking which country the cast of *The Jersey Shore* would need to move to become *The South America Shore*.

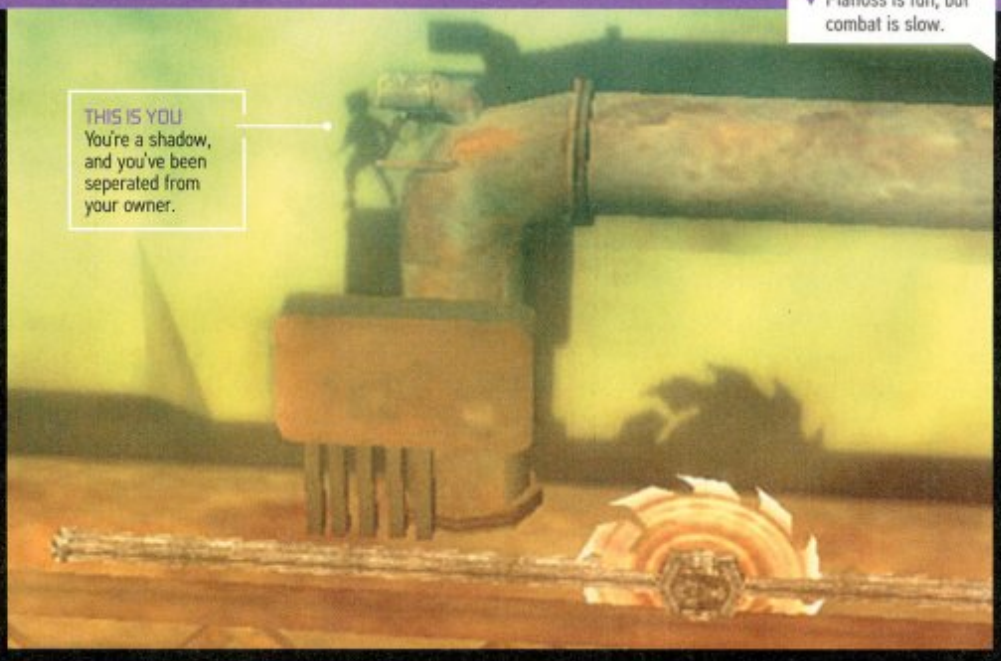
It spoke volumes to me when, after we were done playing, my mom asked me to bring *YDKJ* and my Xbox 360 to the next family party. Sure, the humor is crude, but it's nothing worse than you'd find in an R-rated comedy. Assuming your company doesn't blush easily, I almost guarantee you and yours will be hooked on *YDKJ*'s sophomoric charm.

▲ Questions will be thrown at you in all different ways, so do yourself a favor and brush up on useless facts.

ANDY SAYS:

You Don't Know Jack is a great trivia game, and I'm glad to see it back in the mix. Now, time to challenge Wil and Steak to an official @GAMER trivia challenge! (I'm betting on me.)

FUN FACT
Both Andy S. and Jack have the exact same hairstyle (or lack thereof)!



▼ Platfoss is fun, but combat is slow.

LOST IN SHADOW

Mesmerizing meandering • Words: Heidi Kemps

What if you woke up to find yourself as a shadow on a wall, separated from your owner? That's the novel premise behind *Lost in Shadow*. With no memory to go on, a sentient shade must scale a forboding tower to reunite with its owner. Aided by a friendly fairy, you'll scale and jump across platforms, solve puzzles, and fight off foes to discover the truth behind your being.

Lost in Shadow's strength is its clever use of its thematic material. Instead of running on the platforms you see in the foreground, your character is only able to traverse the shadows these objects cast. This allows for clever puzzles where you can do things like control directions of light sources to cast shadow in different places or utilize your fairy friend to move foreground objects to change the shape of background shadows. The mix of puzzles and platforming action, combined with an eerie atmosphere, makes for a very engaging game.

Lost in Shadow isn't without dark spots, though. The combat is slow-paced and limited, certain platforming sequences are very difficult (any puzzle involving swinging lamps is rage-inducing), and the checkpoint system is often frustrating—dying in the middle of a long stage means starting over and repeating a lot of puzzles. These flaws are easily overlooked, however, once the game sucks you into its strange, unsettling world. If you're looking for something unique and memorable, this is a game worth getting lost in.

▼ YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME

▲ This fairy will be your companion, or rather, your cursor. Pointing her around lets you manipulate shadows.

▲ Sometimes the game is all, "Yo, I'm gonna look like a Game Boy for a while," and you're like, "Cool story, bro."

ANDY SAYS:

Platformers have been around for going on 30 years, and just when I thought that I'd seen it all *Lost in Shadow* comes along. It's a pretty fresh breath of air for an overfamiliar genre.

Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

LOST IN SHADOW

INFO
Publisher: Hudson Entertainment
Developer: Hudson Soft
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
January 4, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Platformer fans looking for a fresh take on an old genre

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fantastic, moody atmosphere
- ❤ Clever implementation of shadows into puzzles and stage design

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Clunky combat
- ✖ Poor checkpoint system

- Giant towers
- Bizarre experiments
- Shadow monsters

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

TRON: EVOLUTION

INFO
Publisher: Disney Interactive
Developer: Propaganda
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 10 players online

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
December 7, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Hardcore Flynn fans dying to drive lightcycles or run on the game grid's walls

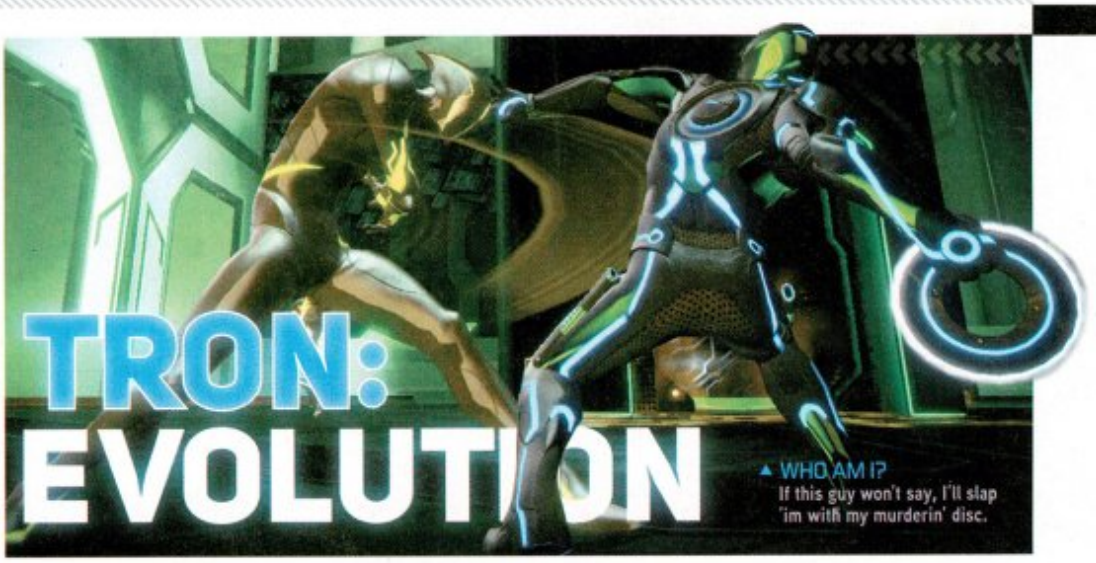
WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Really cool-looking world
- ❤ Finding your groove and gracefully bouncing off the walls
- ❤ Pulling off sweet combos against a half-dozen enemies

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Imprecise controls don't jive with...
- ✖ ...too-precise, perfection-only platforming

- Greetings, Program
- The Grid's Sufficient
- End of Line

OVERALL RATING: 2.5/5

Gamer



TRON: EVOLUTION

▲ WHO AM I?
If this guy won't say, I'll slap 'im with my murderin' disc.

Neither evolving nor devolving... • Words: Mitch Dyer

The reason games like *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* and *Prince of Persia* succeed as platformers is because they do all the heavy lifting—miss your mark and the characters extend an arm to catch the nearest ledge. "Tron Guy" (*Tron: Evolution*'s apparently anonymous protagonist) doesn't have that ability, falling to his immediate death...a lot. I blame the twitchy controls, which also don't mesh with the perfection-demanding platforming, bosses who kill you in one hit, and the frustratingly tough fights against a bunch of bad guys.

I spent a lot of my time with *Tron: Evolution* irritated by its shortcomings. But when I found my groove, the third-person platforming felt just like the *Prince of Persias* or *Assassin's Creeds* I love so much. The combat, too, improves substantially when you're leaping between walls while hurling explosives into groups of way-tough bad guys.

On a fundamental level I dig leaping off ledges and blistering around the grid on lightcycles, but *Evolution* doesn't do anything to...well, evolve. Its campaign stays mostly the same throughout, and its multiplayer doesn't do a lot to change things up. I figure the super-hardcore Tron fans are willing to overlook *Evolution*'s greater flaws in favor of exploring its pretty, neon-lit world and taking part in the events leading up to the *Tron Legacy* film. To me, it was agitating, if never overly bad. That's more than I can say about other movie-based games.

TAKE THAT, INDECIPHERABLE ENEMY!

Daft Punk, the helmeted, French dance/electronica duo, are responsible for *Legacy*'s original soundtrack. They also appear in the film as cameo characters inside the End of Line Club, a location I saw briefly in the game. You can hear bits and pieces of their new tracks while playing *Evolution*, but it's a soundtrack really worth owning. Check TronSoundtrack.com to sample some songs.

ANDY SAYS:

Tron seems like it should be a great universe for games. Too bad this wasn't better.

Lightcycle: Ride the murder machine.

TO ME, IT WAS AGITATING...

PICTIONARY
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Page 44
Score: 3.5

UDRAW GAMETABLET & GAMES

And art for all... • Words: Heidi Kemps

Stylus-driven gaming isn't new—the Nintendo DS has been successfully using a stylus to control games for years now—but it's mostly been relegated to the realm of portable consoles. With the release of the uDraw GameTablet peripheral for the Wii, THQ aims to take stylus gaming into the family room.

The uDraw itself is a solid piece of hardware, made to withstand frequent use. Setting up the uDraw is as simple as sliding the Wii Remote into a holster and starting up a uDraw-compatible game. The large stylus can be easily held by anyone, and the unit sits comfortably on your lap. It also enables access to the buttons on the Wii Remote and augments its accelerometer features. It's not as advanced as PC drawing tablets, however—the lack of pressure sensitivity and the cord-tethered stylus make it unsuitable for professional art applications.

Three games are currently available for the unit (*uDraw Studio*, *Pictionary*, and *Dood's Big Adventure*), with the promise of more in the future. *uDraw Studio* is packaged with the unit, and is among the most robust art/creativity applications yet released for consoles, though a far cry from PC graphics suites. *Pictionary* is an electronic version of the beloved art-charades game with special "mania" modes that add an extra layer of challenge. Finally, *Dood's Big Adventure* is an ambitious and heavily customizable platform game that utilizes all of the uDraw's unique features. Solid construction, affordability, and software selection make the uDraw very appealing. Just don't expect to make masterpieces.

UDRAW STUDIO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Pipeworks
Score: 3.0

▲ *uDraw Studio* allows for budding artists to experiment with a wide variety of simulated materials.

DOOD'S BIG ADVENTURE
Publisher: THQ
Developer: THQ
Score: 3.5

▲ Decorate a 3D hero and go for high scores in the novel fantasy world of *Dood's Big Adventure*.

ANDY SAYS:

It's cool that companies are trying non-game software on the Wii. While it's not a full-featured art tablet, the uDraw GameTablet does seem like it'd be a good intro to art for many users, especially children. Hopefully it'll get more compatible software this year.

Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

UDRAW GAMETABLET

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: THQ
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Varies by game (*Pictionary* supports up to four "teams" locally)

GENRE
Various

RELEASE DATE
November 14, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Those who believe the pen is mightier than the waggle

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Easy for anyone to set up and use
- ❤ Relatively inexpensive compared to other peripherals—and the games are cheap, too
- ❤ Good initial selection of games that shows off the peripheral's features

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ No pressure sensitivity
- ✖ The tethered stylus restricts movement

GAMER
- Creativity
- Competition
- Customizability

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

Mini Reviews:

CHECK THESE SHORTIES!

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

▼ Lightcycle battles require hours of clean-up.

▼ *Battle Grids'* mini-games may be unplayable by chronic hexagonophobes.

TRON: EVOLUTION—BATTLE GRIDS

EVERYONE 10+ ESRB

Words: Malt Cabral

Publisher: Disney Interactive • Developer: n-Space • Platforms: Wii

Rather than a story-driven adventure like *Tron: Evolution* on PS3/Xbox 360, *Battle Grids* offers Wii owners a more arcade-y experience. A series of mini-games—strung together by a light narrative—puts up to four players in the grid for some of the sci-fi series' most iconic challenges, from hurling light discs and hyperballs to piloting lightcycles and battle tanks. The lightning-fast future games succeed in making you feel like you've been sucked into that iconic neon-blue world. Despite this appeal, however, *Battle Grids* is held back by dated visuals, finicky controls, and repetitive gameplay. Still, it's one of the better movie-related titles I've played in a while, and gaming on the grid with up to three friends can be a bragging rights-fueled blast.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Up to four players locally

GENRE: Action

RELEASE DATE: December 7, 2010

SUITABLE FOR: *Tron* fans who lightcycle

OVERALL RATING: 3/5

H.A.W.X. 2

TEEN ESRB

Words: Chris Plante

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Romania • Platforms: Wii

If you played H.A.W.X 2 for PS3 or Xbox 360, you should know that the Wii version is a different game, noticeably abandoning the HD title's sim gameplay. This results in a more casual experience. The art is colorful and sharp, the menu screens feature a catchy pop tune, and there's even a cute family drama that unfolds through storyboard-style cut-scenes in the campaign.

There's plenty to blow up on the combat side, with myriad plane, convoy, and freighter targets. If it can go boom, it will go boom. Unfortunately, most missions devolve into locate target/destroy target/repeat...or locate target, kill target, keep killing target. For those who can't get enough of virtual dogfights or the Tom Clancy mythos, H.A.W.X 2's a serviceable addition to the franchise.

▼ Wow, it's almost as if this plane is going to fly out of the magazine!

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Two players cooperative local

GENRE: Flight combat

RELEASE DATE: November 9, 2010

SUITABLE FOR: Wannabe ace pilots, Tom Clancy junkies

OVERALL RATING: 2.75/5

▼ L: Congrats, you're the biggest target ever. R: Some missions take you into Sepiastan.

TWO WORLDS II

Words: Alex Porter

Publisher: SouthPeak Games • Developer: TopWare Interactive • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

In case you missed it, Two Worlds was an open-world RPG that most gamers wrote off as a buggy, poor man's Oblivion. Yet it still sold well enough to merit a sequel. The results? A surprisingly good-looking and entertaining slab of swords 'n' spells fun.

This time around the console version isn't a clunky port, so Xbox 360 and PS3 controls are nice and manageable. For instance, radial menus and easy-to-assign hotkeys let you quickly change battle roles, cast spells, and bring the pain. In fact, the game's built around flexibility. Despite a linear, story-driven path you get tons of choice in travel, combat, and spell, item, weapon, and armor creation. Add to that some genre-bending elements, a solid story and satisfying, over-the-top violence and methinks we have a winnah!

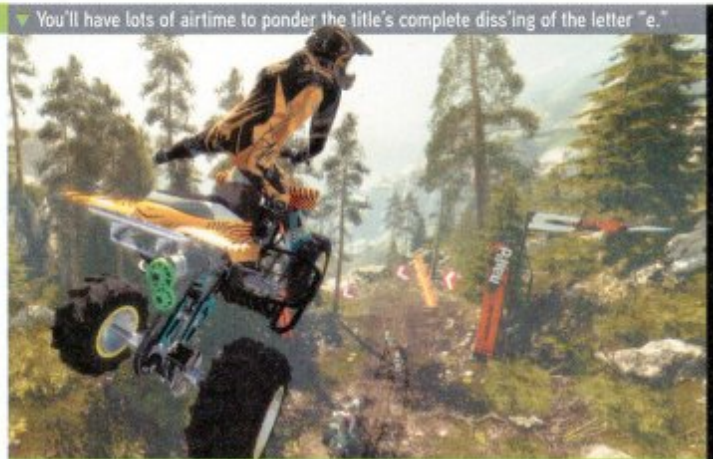
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Up to eight players
GENRE: RPG
RELEASE DATE: January 25, 2011
SUITABLE FOR: Hack 'n' slash fans who like hot sword-swinging action

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

▼ Cleavia, Arch-demoness of Underboob.

▼ Defying fantasy convention, you can totally be BBs with the green fang-y people.

▼ You'll have lots of airtime to ponder the title's complete diss'ing of the letter "e."



▼ Pictured: Rider's right shoulder. Not pictured: Where the rider is actually going.

NAIL'D

Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Publisher: DeepSilver • Developer: Techland • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Off-road arcade racers were everywhere not too long ago, but became too extreme for their own good, fizzling into obscurity. Nail'd brings back what I loved about the genre: blurring speed, insane crashes, and tight handling—but some warts came along for the ride, too.

Nail'd's charm is its ability to ride on the edge of ridiculousness without slipping off. Yeah, you're plummeting at least half-a-mile down stomach-tightening drops and doing wheelies on hot-air balloons, but it never feels dumb or cheesy.

Rough edges show in the front-end menus, making it nearly impossible to see which upgrade parts are newly unlocked and which races you've medaled in. And while the course design is among the best I've seen, races feel too long (single laps can take over two minutes). Nail'd is a podium finish, but it's more bronze than gold.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: 12-player online or system link
GENRE: Racing
RELEASE DATE: November 30, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Adrenaline junkies

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

Noted Mario ex Pauline, kidnapped by a giant ape *yet again*. People are starting to talk.

Disturbing gives way to pure horror when the small android starts swinging hammers.

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG: MINI-LAND MAYHEM!

EVERYONE E ESRB

Words:Malt Cabral

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: NST • Platforms: DS

Nintendo's army of mechanical mini-Marios return for another Donkey Kong-thwarting puzzler, pitting you against the angry ape and challenging environments. Once again, you're tasked with navigating the diminutive robot Marios—and other shrunken Nintendo stars—through increasingly obstructive levels by manipulating their surroundings. While the *Lemmings*-like gameplay will feel familiar if you've played the series' previous entries, some tweaks and charming visuals should keep your thumbs and minds engaged. Once your pocket-sized plumbers have conquered the solo campaign, you can create and share your own maps for infinite puzzling possibilities.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Online level sharing
GENRE: Puzzle
RELEASE DATE: November 14, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Puzzle fans who like a little Mario—literally!—in their games

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

GOLDEN SUN: DARK DAWN

EVERYONE 10+ E ESRB

Words: Heidi Kemps

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Camelot • Platforms: DS

It's been a long time coming, but the third Golden Sun game is finally here. It's gorgeous, boasting some of the best visual design on the DS. Memorable elements of the original games are abundant in Dark Dawn: clever puzzles, hidden treasures, a strong soundtrack, and great dungeon design. Stylus-driven use of the characters' Psynergy powers also adds freshness to puzzle-solving. But annoying aspects from previous games cross over as well: The cliché-ridden story meanders, characters blather on, and the turn-based combat is still a pushover (save for certain bosses). Dark Dawn falls short of excellence, but remains a charming and engaging RPG experience well suited to the portable format.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Single-player only
GENRE: RPG
RELEASE DATE: November 29, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: RPGers wanting an on-the-go fix

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

Are they really "stealthy scouts" if they're appearing all the time?

Blue skin, red eyes, menacing armor...I think these might be the bad guys!

EA SPORTS ACTIVE 2

Words: Andy Salisbury

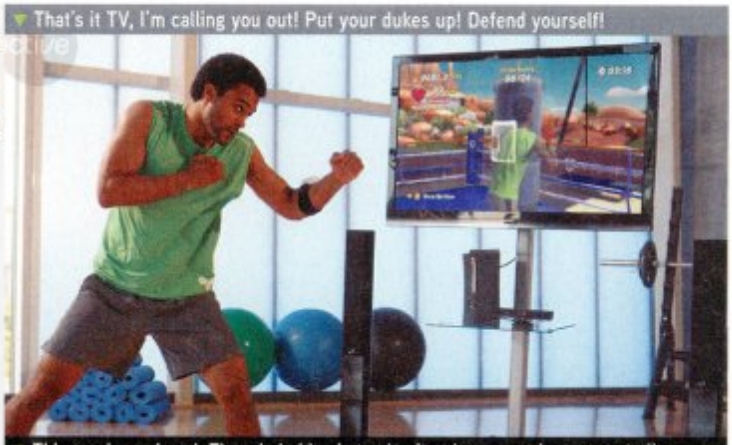
Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: EA Canada •
Platforms: Xbox 360

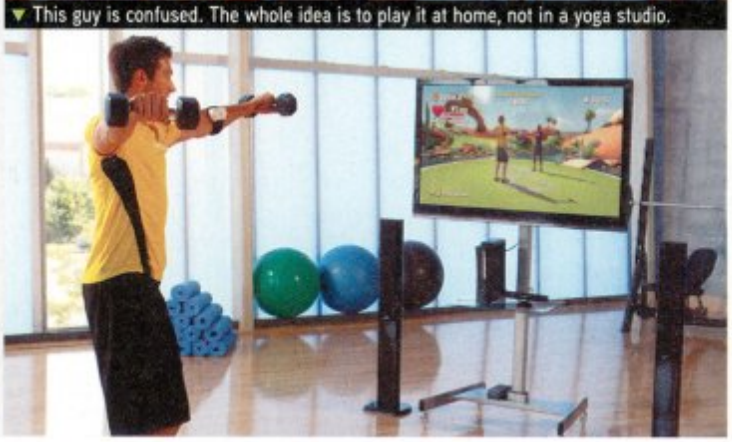
EA Sports Active 2 features a whopping 162 workouts, and several modes of play that will enable you to track your own personal-fitness goals. And while the workouts are awfully neat, the coolest feature of EA Sports Active 2 is without a doubt the heart-rate monitor (which, from a distance, looks shockingly like a white Lindsay Lohan-esque "ankle bracelet") that accurately keeps track of your heart rate and will provide additional motion tracking.

EA Sports Active 2 legitimately provides a strong alternative to going to the gym, if you're inclined to do this sort of thing. However, be wary of the $100 price tag. It could reasonably be paid off after a few months of gym membership fees, but you also need a wealth of space to properly play the game.

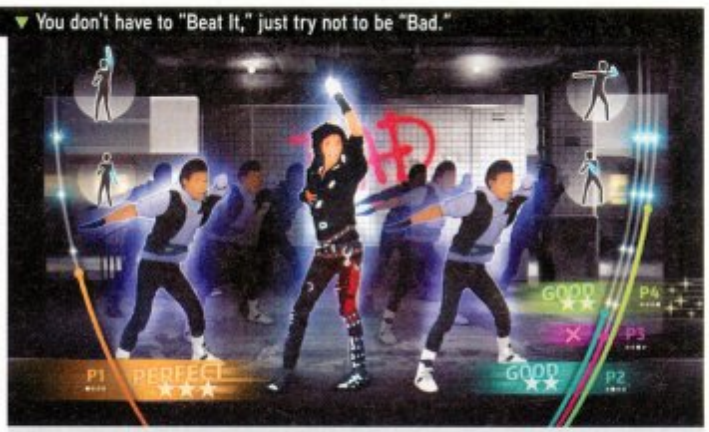
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE:
One or two local players
GENRE: Exercise
RELEASE DATE:
November 16, 2010
SUITABLE FOR:
A home workout...seriously!

OVERALL RATING:
4/5


That's it TV, I'm calling you out! Put your dukes up! Defend yourself!


This guy is confused. The whole idea is to play it at home, not in a yoga studio.

Just Dance 2 provides over 40 songs, with more available for download.



You don't have to "Beat It," just try not to be "Bad."

JUST DANCE 2

Words: Chris Plante

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier/Paris •
Platforms: Wii

Do you need a stress-free way to exercise? Could your parties use friendly dance-off competitions? Are you attracted to flashing lights, serpentine bodies, and pop music? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, Just Dance 2 was made for you. With better music, an improved design, and a duet mode that lets you dance with a friend, this sequel improves upon the original. It may not be as glamorous as Kinect's Dance Central, but it's just as much fun—and without Kinect, much more affordable.

OVERALL RATING: 4.0

MICHAEL JACKSON: THE EXPERIENCE

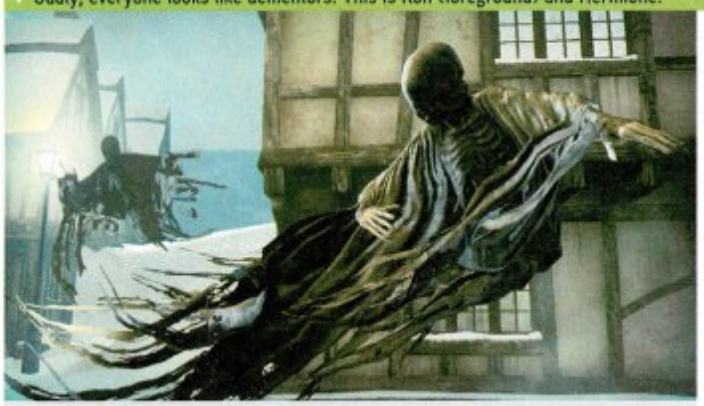
Words: Andrew Hayward

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier/Paris •
Platforms: Wii

Essentially a King of Pop-ified version of Just Dance, Michael Jackson: The Experience isn't the most technical or skill-based dancing game, nor is it particularly robust, with just one play mode and 27 songs. But when hits such as "Thriller" and "Smooth Criminal" start blasting, it's easy to forget the simplistic design and just embrace the great choreography, fantastic songs, and classic MJ iconography. Bring friends, though: As in real life, busting moves is always better with backup.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

▼ Oddly, everyone looks like dementors. This is Ron (foreground) and Hermione.



HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS-PART 1: THE VIDEOGAME

Words: Mitch Dyer

Publisher: EA • Developer: EA Bright Light • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

An over-the-shoulder, cover-based shooter starring Harry Potter? Yes, Deathly Hallows—Part 1 is out-and-out inspired by Epic's beefy man simulator, and that alone should be a winning formula. But Deathly Hallows simply doesn't do anything new, and it also doesn't do anything old terribly well. It's merely a competent third-person shooter, plagued by predictable problems like tedious backtracking, bad voice acting, and recycled levels. Maybe Part 2 will deliver more excitement. This one's for the muggles.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

▼ Ice Storm Mode capitalizes on the age-old feud between gems and ice.

BEJEWELED 3

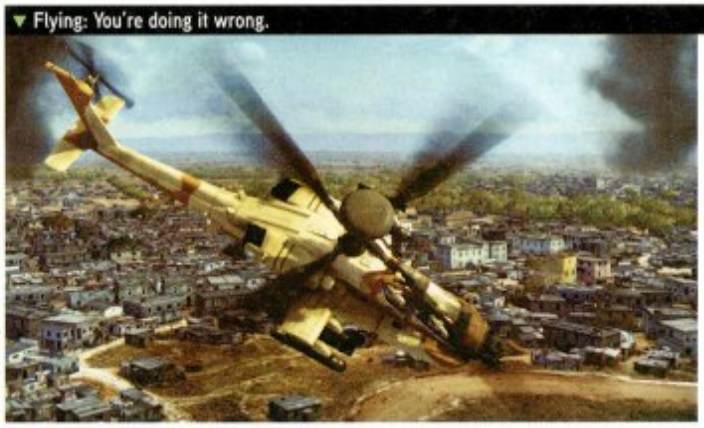
Words: Andy Eddy

Publisher: PopCap Games • Developer: PopCap Games • Platforms: Mac, PC

If you figured Bejeweled 3 would just be Bejeweled 2 with better-looking gems, you're wrong. PopCap has pushed the basic "match three" concept in numerous directions, such as Poker (each set of five sequential matches becomes a "hand") and Butterflies (with each move, colored butterflies ascend toward a hungry spider, while clever matches keeps them safe). I wish my top scores were saved to an Internet "cloud," so I'd have them when I eventually play the game on a console and my smartphone, but that's a minor miss for this elegant yet highly challenging casual game.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

▼ Flying: You're doing it wrong.



APACHE: AIR ASSAULT

Words: Jorden Baughman

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Gaijin Entertainment • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Gaijin, *Apache: Air Assault*'s developer, is known for flight sims frought with realism, and while *Apache* shows that attention to detail, the budget title's gameplay can't mask its low production values. The chopper's flight mechanics are complex and require much finesse, but most gamers won't appreciate it due to the lack of competent tutorials. Likewise, the solo campaign's repetitive mission structure and MIA narrative make for a game that quickly gets stale. While online co-op does give *Apache* some staying power, only die-hard flight-sim fans should pick this up.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

▼ *Will* Rick ever realize that "get possessed by a mask" is a crappy plan?

SPLATTERHOUSE

Words: Andy Eddy

Publisher: Namco Bandai • Developer: Namco Bandai • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

Splatterhouse is just a typical love story: Boy meets Girl. Boy falls in love with Girl. Girl gets kidnapped by Mad Doctor. Boy dons talking Terror Mask that promises to reunite him with Girl...after Mask turns Boy into Hulking Homocidal Maniac, who dissects, decapitates, and disembowels countless minions. Gamer goes nearly insane from relentless button-mashing. Gamer briefly excited by special Splatter Kills—then suffers letdown after the moves become monotonous. Gamer trades in Game at Best Buy for credit. The End.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Joint Assault	01	4
Alpha Protocol	01	3
Apache: Air Assault	06	2.5
Arcania: Gothic 4	04	3.25
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	05	4.5
B		
Backbreaker	01	3.5
Batman: The Brave and the Bold–The Videogame	03	2.5
Bejeweled 3	06	4.5
C		
Call of Duty: Black Ops	05	5
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow	04	4
City of Heroes: Going Rogue	02	4
Clash of the Titans	02	2.5
Crackdown 2	01	4.5
D		
Dance Central	05	4.5
DanceMasters	05	4
Dead Rising 2	04	4
Def Jam Rapstar	05	3.75
DJ Hero 2	05	4
Dragon Ball: Origins 2	01	3.5
E		
EA Sports Active 2	06	4
EA Sports MMA	04	4.5
Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	04	4.75
EyePet	03	3
F		
F1: 2010	04	4.75
Fable III	05	4.25
Fallout: New Vegas	05	4
FIFA Soccer 11	04	4.5
Final Fantasy XIV	04	3.5
Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light	04	3.75
Front Mission: Evolved	03	4
G		
God of War: Ghost of Sparta	05	5
Golden Sun: Dark Dawn	06	3.75
Gran Turismo 5	06	3.5
Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	03	4
H		
H.A.W.X 2	06	2.75
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1	06	2.5
Halo: Reach	03	4.5
J		
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	05	3.75
Just Dance 2	06	4
K		
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	02	4.5
Kinect Adventures	05	4.5
Kinect Joy Ride	05	2.5
Kinect Sports	05	4
Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep	02	4.5
Kirby's Epic Yarn	05	4.5
Knights in the Nightmare	04	4.25
Kung Fu Rider	03	3.5
L		
Lara Croft: Guardian of Light	02	4.5
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1–4	01	4.5
LEGO Universe	05	3.75
LittleBigPlanet 2	06	4.5
The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest	03	3
Lost in Shadow	06	4
M		
Madden NFL 11	02	4.5
Mafia II	02	4
Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem!	06	4.5
Medal of Honor	04	3.75
Metroid: Other M	02	4
Michael Jackson: The Experience	06	3
MotionSports	05	3
N		
Nail'd	06	3.75
Naughty Bear	01	3.5
Need for Speed Hot Pursuit	05	4.25
Need for Speed World	02	4
NHL 11	03	4.5
NHL 2K11	03	3.5
NHL Slapshot	04	4.25
P		
PlayStation Move	03	5
Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs	05	4
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011	05	4
Professor Layton and the Unwound Future	04	4
R		
Racquet Sports	04	2.5
Rock Band 3	04	4.5
Rock Band: Green Day	01	3.5
R.U.S.E.	03	4
S		
Samurai Warriors 3	05	2.5
Shank	03	4
Sid Meier's Civilization V	03	4.5
The Sims 3	04	4.25
The Sims 3: Ambitions	01	4.5
The Sims 3: Late Night	05	3.75
Sonic Colors (DS)	06	3.5
Sonic Colors (Wii)	06	4.5
Sonic Free Riders	05	3.75
Sniper: Ghost Warrior	01	3
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	03	3.5
Splatterhouse	06	2.5
Sports Champions	03	4
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	02	5
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	05	3.5
Start the Party	03	3
Super Mario All-Stars	06	4
Super Mario Galaxy 2	01	5
Super Scribblenauts	04	4.5
T		
Tiger Woods: PGA Tour 11	01	4
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X 2	03	4
Tron: Evolution	06	2.5
Tron: Evolution Battle Grids	06	3
Two Worlds II	06	4
U		
uDraw Game Tablet and Games	06	3.5
V		
Vanquish	04	3.5
W		
Wii Party	05	4
World of Warcraft: Cataclysm	06	4.75
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011	05	4
Y		
You Don't Know Jack	06	4.5
GEAR		
Able Planet NC300W True Fidelity Headphones	04	3
Alienware M11XR2	04	5
Creative World of Warcraft Headset	03	3
GeForce GTX 460	03	4
GeForce GTX 470	01	3
GeForce GTX 480	01	4
Gunnar Optiks MLG Phantom Mercury	04	3.5
Iomega Prestige 1TB Desktop Hard Drive	01	4
Kinect	05	4.5
Logitech G930	06	4.25
Mad Catz Cyborg R.A.T. 7	03	5
Mad Catz MC2 Racing Wheel	06	3
SplitFish FragFX Shark	06	3.75
SteelSeries Shift	06	4.5
Tritton AX 720	01	4
Turtle Beach: Ear Force X41	01	3
Western Digital My Book Essential 2TB External Hard Drive	01	4

Because Jess plays video games the ESRB
(that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) understands that some games aren't right for everyone.
Just like movies, every game has a rating. And those ratings come from the ESRB.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

www.ESRB.org

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GEAR

92 Mad Catz MC2 Racing Wheel for Xbox 360

93 Logitech G930 Wireless Headset

94 SplitFish FragFX Shark Gaming Controller

95 SteelSeries Shift Gaming Keyboard

Where to purchase:

ONLINE

Check BestBuy.com for availability.

WIL SAYS:

Here at @GAMER we like stuff. And well, the fact that you're reading this lets us know that you also like stuff. Of course, there's a lot of stuff out there and a lot of it is crap. Which is where we come in. Every month we do our best to help you separate the wheat from the chaff. So have at it, folks.

Words: William O'Neal • Photos: Mark Madeo and Samantha Berg

MAD CATZ MC2

RACING WHEEL

FEETS DON'T FAIL ME NOW:
The MC2's pedals worked great on @GAMER's carpeted floors, but they were much less effective on other, more slippery, surfaces. Good thing you can use them without the pedals.

WORDS
William O'Neal

Players of racing games already know that a good racing wheel is an essential accessory. Designed for the more casual Xbox 360 player, the Mad Catz MC2 is a great wheel for someone who knows that driving a car with a gamepad is most definitely not the way to go.

I tested the MC2 with several games, ranging from the hardcore sim-like F1 2010 to the more arcade-like *Need for Speed Hot Pursuit*. Regardless of the complexity of the game, the MC2 was a much better controller than the Xbox 360 controller. While the MC2 bests the standard Xbox 360 controller it paled in comparison to the more expensive MOMO-inspired Logitech Wheels of yesteryear as well as the more recent Logitech Driving Force GT for the PS3. The MC2 felt a little cheap in comparison to the more expensive wheels and while I liked the way that it fit on my lap it did tend to slip off when things got hairy. That said, it's still a good piece of kit to add to your arsenal.

MANUFACTURER:
Mad Catz
www.madcatz.com

COMPATIBLE WITH:
Xbox 360, PC

RETAIL VALUE:
$99.99

Ratings

- Affordable
- Light
- Control

OVERALL RATING 3/5

While the wheel felt nice, I wished it was a little more solid.

The shifter makes playing sims, such as F1 2010, a bit easier.

The rubberized wheel is nice and comfortable.

I liked being able to place the MC2 on my lap. That said, it did slip.

LOGITECH G930

WIRELESS HEADSET

WORDS
Andy Salisbury

MANUFACTURER:
Logitech
www.logitech.com

COMPATIBLE WITH:
PC, Mac

RETAIL VALUE:
$159.99

The Logitech G930 is just about everything I want in a wireless gaming headset: It has a built-in rechargeable battery (awesome) and tremendously high-quality audio (awesome-r).

The built-in battery has an advertised life of up to 10 hours, but my sessions with the headset would last roughly six to eight hours. However, this was more than enough to get me through hardcore gaming sessions.

The audio quality is sharp, and while I've never been impressed with simulated surround sound, the G930's is rock-solid. It enabled me to accurately locate where enemy gunfire was coming from while playing Bad Company 2 online.

Unfortunately, where the G930 falls short is in its weight and comfort. The ear pads are soft, but after a couple of hours they really get uncomfortable. While the weight issue is understandable given that the headset houses a battery, it's another aspect that might wear on you.

The G930's wireless capabilities are strong and feature almost no noticeable latency, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a headset that packs as many features as it does. While there are some notable issues with extended use, none of them are dealbreakers.

Ratings

- Rechargeable
- Freedom
- Simple

OVERALL RATING **4.25/5**

NICE DONGLE:
The wireless reciever stand doubles as a charging cable. Plus, putting it on your desk will give you better signal strength!

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FIND JUST ONE BAD REVIEW

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SPLITFISH

FRAGFX SHARK MOUSE

WORDS
Andy Salisbury

Good ideas are forged out of necessity. And, as a native PC gamer using a mouse to aim precisely in all of my first-person shooters is one big necessity. Given that my main gripe with console shooters is the inaccuracy provided by the all-powerful thumbstick, the FragFX Shark's mouse-on-console concept thoroughly intrigued me.

The FragFX Shark is essentially two pieces. One is half of a PlayStation 3 controller with a D-pad, thumbstick, and shoulder buttons, and the other half is a mouse with left and right buttons as well as face buttons where your right thumb rests. Tying it all together is a wireless dongle that you plug into a PS3 USB slot.

The Shark works exactly as you'd expect. You move your mouse to aim just as you would on PC, and you can use all of the standard controller buttons just as you would on your PS3. Best of all, it's wireless and the lag is almost impossible to detect.

Unfortunately for the Shark, its hardware is a little weak. The mouse's click action feels extremely sticky, and the face buttons prove hard to press in their current location. Which is actually quite unfortunate, because if it wasn't for those flaws this bad boy would be a must-have for any FPS player that chooses to do their killing on PS3.

MANUFACTURER:
SplitFish
www.aplitfish.com

COMPATIBLE WITH:
PS3, PC, Mac

RETAIL VALUE:
$89.99

YOU'VE GOT OPTIONS!
If you're just not interested in the Shark , do yourself a favor and check out the Dual SFX, available right now on www.bestbuy.com!

The shoulder buttons are all here, just as you'd expect.

Ratings

- Remappable
- Dongled
- Click!

OVERALL RATING 3.75/5

Customization is easy with the Shark, thanks to an extremely inventive D-pad. Situated around said D-pad are options that let you swap your control sticks, turn on rapid-fire, program macros, and even remap all your buttons. So go on, make it your own!

The mouse wheel tilts left and right.

The PlayStation's face buttons are on the side of the mouse, and take some getting used to.

STEELSERIES

GAMING KEYBOARD

MIX AND MATCH!
There are many different keysets for the Shift keyboard, including StarCraft II (pictured), World of Warcraft, and Medal of Honor. Just make sure that you fasten them on securely! Available at www.bestbuy.com.

WORDS
George Jones

SteelSeries' Shift keyboard is similar to previous SteelSeries boards like the 7G or the 6Gv2. The keyboard is constructed from high-grade plastic and steel and uses dome switches made out of silicon to imbue the keyboard with remarkable longevity—up to 15 million keystrokes per key. (Most keyboards are rated to last five million keystrokes per key.) This translates into a sleek and modern appearance and remarkably fast and comfortable action regardless of whether you're typing entering gaming commands.

The big difference is that the Shift is customizable in a way that most keyboards are not. See all those keys? You can quickly and easily swap them out en masse and replace them with a keyset custom-designed specifically for games such as World of Warcraft and StarCraft II. (Keysets are sold separately.) Frankly, I'm not 100% sure that's a great value. Thankfully, they're optional, and you can perform plenty of on-the-fly customizations via a dizzying array of hot keys and hot-key modifiers.

MANUFACTURER:
SteelSeries
www.steelseries.com

COMPATIBLE WITH:
Windows XP, Vista, 7, Mac OSX

RETAIL VALUE:
$90.00

These eight buttons and three profile buttons give you 24 on-the-fly recordable hotkeys.

A series of optional keysets allow you to see all of the default hotkey settings for a variety of games, including World of Warcraft.

Ratings

- Responsive
- Customizable
- Expensive

OVERALL RATING **4.5/5**

If you have some videogame "facts" you want to verify as real or urban legend, ask Andy: Send your questions to andy@atgamermagazine.com.

Counter-Action

While it may not be a conscious pursuit, we all want to be popular. We shower to look (and smell) better. We pick out stylish clothing to spiff up our appearance (though everyone's view of what's "stylish" leaves the final results open to interpretation). When we pass a mirror or store window, we stop and check the reflection to see if anything's out of place—or just to confirm that we're "lookin' good."

From that standpoint, games have it easy. They don't have to deal with vanity or jealousy as we humans do. They don't have to stand on a stage and belt out "My Heart Will Go On" or strut down a runway in a revealing bikini in front of a panel of scrutinizing judges. At the end of the day, they just have to look at straight-up sales numbers. This issue's "Truth or Lies" questions address which games had the higher numbers after all of them went through the turnstiles.

IMAGE: JILLIAN PIERCE

TRUTH OR LIES:

I just started playing World of Warcraft and I know it's popular, but my friend said there are over ten million players. It never seems that crowded when I'm on, so I find that number hard to believe. Is he telling the truth?

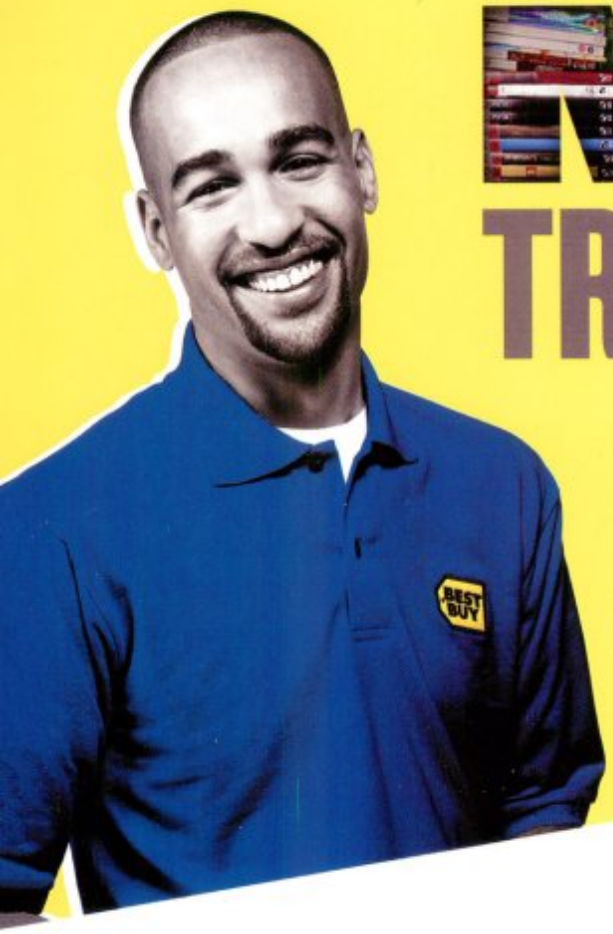
TRUTH

He's not putting a debuff on your gullibility with a Circle of Agony. (Sorry, a little WoW humor there.) In fact, according to an announcement from Blizzard this past October, the game has over 12 million subscribers—and while some of those can be one player with multiple accounts, that's still a lot of potential player characters. The reason you don't see all of them is that Blizzard has dozens of WoW servers, each of which can handle thousands of players simultaneously romping around Azeroth. Technically, this spreads the load across numerous machines, so your gameplay doesn't slow to a standstill. It does create issues—such as if you meet another WoW player in real life and want to play together, you can't just jump onto their server or them on yours; it requires a request to Blizzard to move a character from one server to the other—but the process enables Blizzard to keep the gameplay snappy for everyone that does play.

I have a pretty sizable bet with a friend of mine that the best-selling video game on a single system is Mario Kart on Wii. Andy, we're counting on you to determine the winner. Am I gonna take her money?

LIES

Sorry, you're close, but you'll need to pay up. According to figures released by Nintendo in spring 2010, Mario Kart had sold over 22.5 million copies. On that same list, though, Wii Play was said to have sold more than 27 million—though, to be fair, Wii Play was bundled with a Wii Remote, a "premium" I feel gives the game's sales an unfair slant. On the same list, Nintendogs was shown as having sold over 23 million—but those results are also skewed by the fact that there were multiple versions of the game (similar to combining sales of Pokémon Red and Pokémon Blue into one number). Therefore, we see Wii Fit with its 22.6 million units sold as the one with the crown. Seeing that sales continue on all of these titles, you might opt to stall the payout and keep checking the sales figures in hopes that you hit a point where more people own Mario Kart, because according to Nintendo's figures, it outsold Wii Fit during Fiscal Year 2010 by close to a 3-to-2 margin.



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